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DANTE HIS LIFE AND WORK AG FERRERS HOWELL



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DANTE

HIS LIFE AND WORK

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE object of this book is to give such a general view of the life, writings, and teaching of Dante as will encourage those to whom the subject is new to proceed to a closer acquaintance with a writer who, though often using the language of a particular age, has a claim on the attention of men in every age. It will be understood that in a work of this kind, from which the discussion of doubtful points is necessarily excluded, the author must sometimes assume the appearance of laying down the law.

In the Appendix information is given as to some books likely to be useful to the student; but it must not be forgotten that it is more profitable as well as more interesting to read Dante than to read about Dante.

In the last chapter (on the Central Allegory of the *Divine Comedy*) the author is indebted to the Rev. P. H. Wicksteed for kind permission to make use of the syllabus of his course of twelve lectures on Dante (Oxford, 1907).

References to Dante's works are to the "Temple Classics" edition of them, and translations of passages in them are, except where otherwise stated, quoted (with some alterations) from that edition. In the case of the prose works, it may not be amiss to point out that the numbering of the lines in the "Temple Classics" edition corresponds with that in Dr. Moore's *Oxford Dante*.

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DANTE

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF DANTE

DANTE was born at Florence in May 1265. He was of gentle birth and ancient lineage, though his family was not one of the principal in Florence. In a well-known passage (*Par.* xv., xvi.) he introduces his ancestor, Cacciaguida, who flourished in the twelfth century, was knighted by the Emperor Conrad III., and died in a crusade against the Mussulmans. Cacciaguida's wife came (as the poet himself tells us) from the valley of the Po, and it was she who brought the name Alaghiero (afterwards Alighieri) into the family. The name Dante is certainly an abbreviation of Durante. Of Dante's father, Alighieri, little is known, except that he was a notary. Dante's mother's name was Bella: it is uncertain to what family she belonged. Both Dante's parents were dead by the time he was eighteen. His family was one of moderate fortune—they had houses in the city of Florence and landed property in the outlying territory, or "Contado."

In 1274, when Dante was nine years old, occurred the event which exercised a paramount and unique influence on his after-life—his first meeting with Beatrice, then

in the beginning of her ninth year, when, as he himself tells us, "she showed herself to him in a garment of a most noble colour—a subdued and goodly crimson—girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age. At that moment . . . the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith, and in trembling it said these words: 'Behold a god stronger than I who at his coming shall rule over me.'"¹ Nine years later he began to write those lyrics in her honour, a large number of which he collected after her death and linked together by the narrative commentary which, with them, forms that little book the *Vita Nuova*, or New Life, wherein the story of his early love for her, and its vicissitudes is set forth. By the title "New Life," he probably meant to intimate the renewal or transfiguration of his life by his love for Beatrice. The nature of his devotion to Beatrice is thus described by a well-known writer on Dante.² "For him, Love and Beatrice are one thing only, he feels her approach as that of a deity. In her bearing there is ever something divine, she is o'erspread with love, beautified by a smile ineffable, in her eyes there flashes a welcome—she is no human creature, but yet in the poet's heart ever a woman. Even in death she is no common thing, and death itself in her is fair and amiable. She raises no envy in other women, such is her superiority; nay, she reflects her brightness on them." With regard to her identity, the notion that she was a mere abstract creation is now generally discredited, and in the opinion of the best authorities

¹ *Vita Nuova*, § 2 (Rossetti's trans.).

² Zingarelli, *La Vita di Dante in compendio*, p. 21.

the statement of Boccaccio, that she was the daughter of Folco Portinari, that she became the wife of Simone dei Bardi, and died in her twenty-fourth year in 1290, may be relied on as correct.

Of Dante's education we do not know very much. What part Brunetto Latini had in it is doubtful. Dante's words in *Inf.* xv. 82-85 seem rather to point to the influence exercised upon a young writer by an older and more experienced friend than to any such direct relation of teacher and pupil as some have thought existed between them. F. Novati, in a lecture on Dante's epistles,¹ gives some reasons for thinking that Brunetto may specifically have instructed Dante in rhetoric, including the *Ars dictandi*, or that of composing despatches and state documents.

From the *Vita Nuova* we learn that Dante had himself mastered the art—no easy one in those early days of the language²—of writing poetry in the vulgar tongue. The frequent allusions to music in the Comedy must strike the most careless reader; and that Dante possessed at least a theoretical knowledge of it may be inferred from *De Vulgari Eloquentia* II. 10, a chapter devoted to the musical setting of the Canzone, or Ode. He seems also to have possessed some skill with the pencil, for in *Vita Nuova*, § 35, he tells us that on the first anniversary of Beatrice's death he was sitting and thinking of her, and the while was "drawing an angel on certain little tablets." It seems probable from *Convivio* II. 13 that at the time of the death of Beatrice in 1290 his studies in more serious branches of knowledge had not advanced very far. The passage is worth

¹ *Lectura Dantis : Le Opere Minori di Dante Alighieri*, pp. 288-293.

² See below, Chapter II. pp. 27, 28.

quoting, as it tells us all we really know on the subject :
“ I say that when I had lost the first delight of my soul I remained so absorbed in sorrow that no comfort availed me. However, after some time, my mind, which was struggling to regain its health, saw that it was necessary (as neither mine own nor others’ consolation was of any avail) to try the plan which another disconsolate one had adopted to console himself. And I set myself to read that book of Boëthius, not known to many, wherewith, a prisoner and banished, he had comforted himself. And again, hearing that Tully had written another book, in which treating of ‘ Friendship ’ he had spoken consoling words to Lælius, a most excellent man, on the death of his friend Scipio, I set myself to read that. And although at first it was hard for me to enter into their meaning, I finally penetrated so far as what art of Grammar¹ I possessed, together with some little intellectual power of my own, could do ; by which intellectual power I had already beheld many things as it were dreaming, as may be seen in the *Vita Nuova*. And just as if a man should go about looking for silver, and apart from his purpose should find gold (which some occult cause presented, perhaps not without Divine ordinance), so I who was seeking to console myself found not only a remedy for my tears, but sayings of authors, and of sciences, and of books ; considering which, I soon decided that Philosophy, who was the sovereign lady of these authors, these sciences and these books, was the supreme thing. And I imagined her as a noble lady ; and I could not imagine her as other than merciful ; wherefore so willingly did my thought dwell upon her that it could scarcely be diverted from her. And on account of this

¹ *I.e.* Latin.

imagination I began to go where she in truth showed herself, that is in the schools of the Religious, and the disputations of the philosophers; so that in a little while, perhaps thirty months, I began to be so deeply aware of her sweetness that the love of her banished and destroyed every other thought." It was probably during this period of strenuous application that Dante suffered from that affection of the eyes, caused by excessive reading, which he speaks of in *Convivio* III. 9: 148.

The period which succeeded Beatrice's death was, so far as Dante's inward life was concerned, a period of moral decline. "The things of the present" (thus he himself confesses to her in the memorable scene on the summit of Purgatory (*Purg.* XXXI. 34)) "with their false pleasure turned my steps aside as soon as your face was hidden." We may not indeed suppose that he became altogether a man of evil life: the nature of the delinquencies with which he charges himself is uncertain; and whatever they were, they were bitterly repented of and nobly atoned for. To this period belongs a remarkable series of poems inspired by an entirely earthly love, to which further reference is made below (pp. 17, 18, 31-33).

But love and philosophy did not claim Dante's whole attention during his earlier years. In 1289 he fought in the battle of Campaldino, in which the Florentines and their allies defeated the army of the Aretines, headed by the Bishop of Arezzo, who remained dead on the field.

From *Inf.* XXI. 94 we may fairly infer that Dante was present at the surrender of the fortress of Caprona—a later incident in the same war—and again in *Inf.* XXII. 1-9 we meet with a distinct statement as to our poet's experience of military service.

At some time before 1298 Dante married Gemma, daughter of Manetto Donati, which brought him into affinity with one of the most powerful of the noble families of Florence. He had, to our knowledge, four children by Gemma—Pietro and Jacopo (the former of whom wrote a commentary on the Comedy, and the latter, one on the *Inferno*), Beatrice, who became a nun of the convent of S. Stefano dell' Uliva at Ravenna, and Antonia, of whom nothing is known, but whose existence is proved by a document of the year 1332.

We now come to Dante's participation in public life. The government of the Republic, or Commonwealth, of Florence was at this time entirely in the hands of the greater trade-guilds, the nobles and the populace being alike excluded from all share in political power. However, a law passed in 1295 provided that enrolment in a guild without the actual exercise of a trade should constitute membership of that guild, and enable the enrolled person to enjoy the political rights inherent in the status of a guild-member; and, taking advantage of this concession, Dante became a member of the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries; and we find his name recorded in the minutes of the deliberations in one or other of the Councils on ten occasions between 1296 and 1301. From 15th June to 15th August, 1300, he was one of the six Priors who, together with an official known as the Gonfalonier of Justice, formed the Signory, which was the supreme executive authority in the state. (The members of the Signory were changed every two months.) The political condition of Florence had for some time been very unstable, on account of the persistent efforts of the magnates, or nobles, to throw off the yoke of the wealthy traders (*popolani*). The quarrel was complicated by a family feud between the

Cerchi and the Donati, whose adherents became known as the "Whites" and the "Blacks" respectively;¹ and finally, by means of an intrigue between Corso Donati, the "Black" leader, and Pope Boniface VIII., the "Whites," who till then had retained the control of the machinery of government, and of whom Dante was a prominent member, were overthrown in November 1301; and the treachery of the Pope's emissary and nominal peace-maker, Charles of Valois,² which enabled the "Blacks" to get the mastery of their opponents, is denounced in Dante's famous invective against the royal house of France in *Purgatorio* xx.

Dante's support of the defeated party cost him dear. On 27th January, 1302, the first sentence of banishment against him and four other prominent "Whites" was promulgated. This document, after reciting the failure of the accused to answer charges of peculation committed when in office, particularly in the spending of public money in resisting the Pope, and the coming of Charles of Valois, and of other acts of policy contrary to the Papal party, sentences them to a heavy fine, and to restore their "illicit extortions" within three days, on pain of confiscation of their property; sentences them to be banished for two years, and declares them, as falsifiers and peculators, to be for ever disqualified from holding any office in Florence. On 10th March a second sentence was published, in which Dante and fourteen other persons were declared by their contumacy to have admitted their guilt, and sentenced to be burned if they should ever come into the power of the Commonwealth.

¹ For full details of the events here touched on, see *Chronicle of Dino Compagni* (Temple Classics).

² Son of Philip III and brother of Philip IV. of France.

The early years of Dante's exile (1302-1310) form the period of his life about which we know least. We know from his touching words in *Convivio* I. 3 (probably written about 1307) that he had wandered nearly all over Italy. It is also possible that he visited Paris, but the itinerary of his exile is a puzzle whose solution seems nearly hopeless. His companions in misfortune were uncongenial—it is indeed not difficult to conjecture that the great poet, with his terrible powers of irony and invective, was not very easy to get on with—and he soon separated from them, though at what precise time he left them has been much disputed. We know, however, that he was still with the main body of the “White” exiles in June 1302.

After his separation from his fellow-exiles, Dante betook himself to Verona, but whether during the dominion of Bartolommeo della Scala, who died in 1304, or of his brother and successor Alboin is uncertain. In October 1306 we find our poet in the district of Lunigiana (modern province of Massa and Carrara), acting as agent for the Marquises Malaspina in a dispute in which they were involved with the Bishop of Luni; and in this capacity he effected a settlement of the quarrel.

This period of Dante's life is important on the literary side. His political career being apparently ended, he determined to serve his generation by his pen, and planned two great works—both left unfinished—the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (probable date about 1304) and the *Convivio* (probable date 1306-1308). The *De Vulgari Eloquentia* will be more conveniently considered in the next chapter. The *Convivio*, or Banquet, was intended to be a great philosophic work, comprising an introductory treatise and fourteen other treatises in the

form of commentaries on certain of his *Canzoni*, or Odes—the fourteen courses of which the “Banquet” was to consist. The introductory treatise and the first three commentary-treatises were alone written. Besides the primary aim of imparting philosophic knowledge to his less favoured contemporaries, the author was moved by a desire to vindicate the efficacy of the Italian language (in which the work is written) as a literary medium; and the concluding chapters of the first treatise contain an impassioned defence of the Italian vernacular against those who decried it, whom he rebukes in no measured terms. We may here note in passing that amazing intuition of genius by which Dante, foreseeing what was hidden from his contemporaries—namely the future glory of the Italian tongue—boldly staked his whole poetic reputation on vernacular compositions.

But there was a third object that Dante had in view in writing the *Convivio*. He had now worked his way out of the vitiated, moral atmosphere in which, as we have seen, he had been involved, and was beginning that gradual return to his original ideal, of which the Comedy is the everlasting memorial. But those passionate lyrics of earthly love remained on record, and in fact caused him serious embarrassment in his character of a teacher of philosophic truth. He goes so far as to say (*Conv.* i. 2: 117) that he feared the “infamy” that might arise from the passion which the reader of those Odes might suppose him to have been subject to. What was to be done with these compromising poems? He took a desperate resolution: he would explain them away. And so he resolved to include them among the “dishes” of his “banquet,” and to allegorise them in such a way as to make them

minister to edification, and not to scandal. But the task proved too hard, or it may be that Dante could not reconcile the disingenuousness of the expedient with the demands of his conscience. Moreover, as we shall see, the expedition of the Emperor Henry VII. into Italy once more diverted Dante's attention to politics; while after Henry's fall, to quote Mr. Wicksteed (*Temple Classics, Convivio*, p. 435), "the world had changed for Dante. His thoughts had been matured, his whole nature had passed through the fire, his life-thought had deepened from that of the *Convivio* to that of the *Comedy*. And if the substance of the *Convivio* had become inadequate, its form and scheme had become impossible." These considerations supply an indication of the reasons which may have led Dante to abandon the *Convivio*.

Since the death of Frederick II. in 1250 no emperor had come into Italy; and Rudolph of Hapsburg (1273-1291) and his son, Albert of Austria (1298-1308), are both blamed by our poet (*Purg.* vii. 91; vi. 97) for their neglect of the "Garden of the Empire" (*Purg.* vi. 107). But in 1309 Dante's hopes were raised to the highest pitch by the determination of Henry, Count of Luxemburg, who had been elected emperor in 1308, to descend into Italy for his coronation at Rome. Henry was a man after Dante's own heart—sincerely desirous of bringing peace to distracted Italy, and convinced of the divine institution and paramount claims of the Empire. Yet his comparatively humble position in Germany, his want of material resources and of any base of operations in Italy, the active opposition of King Robert of Naples, and the lukewarmness of the French Pope, Clement V.,¹ foredoomed him to failure. At first, how-

¹ There is some reason to think that the charge of duplicity

ever, it seemed as though Dante's dream of an emperor who should rule Italy in righteousness were coming true. In the autumn of 1310 Henry crossed the Mt. Cenis and arrived at Turin; the principal cities of Piedmont and Lombardy submitted to him, and there was a general pacification. In January 1311 Henry received the iron crown of Lombardy at Milan. Either here or at Turin, Dante had an interview with him, which he speaks of in a letter addressed to him some months later (18th April 1311) in the following words: "And I, who am writing both on my own behalf and that of others, saw thee, as befits the imperial dignity, to be most benignant, and heard thee utter most gracious words, when my hands touched thy feet, and my lips paid thee their service." ¹

But the bright prospect was soon overcast: discord broke out at Milan: murmurings arose at the heavy contributions which Henry's poverty compelled him to exact. Brescia rebelled, and by means of gold and troops furnished by the "Blacks" of Florence, Henry's authority in Parma, Reggio, and Cremona was overthrown. Instead of hastening on to Rome, Henry committed the fatal error of sitting down before Brescia, which did not surrender till after several months' siege (18th September). This delay filled our poet with apprehension, and in April he had addressed a letter to Henry (that above referred to), written from the "Source of the Arno," in his own name and in that of "all the Tuscans who longed for the peace of the land," exhorting him to come into Tuscany and chastise Florence,

brought against this Pope in *Par.* xvii. 82 cannot be sustained. See *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, xvii. 180 ff.

¹ *Epistola* vii. 38 ff. Temple Classics, *Latin Works of Dante*, p. 325.

even as Samuel exhorted Saul to chastise the Amalekites. "To this end," cries the indignant poet, "thou wast consecrated king, that thou mightest smite Amalek and not spare Agag, and that thou mightest avenge Him who hath sent thee, on the bestial race and their hasty triumph." The ferocity of the language in which in this letter Dante urges the emperor to advance to the overthrow of his native city astonishes us; but it was the language not of one moved by ignoble spite, but of one who verily believed that the Florentines, in resisting the emperor, were resisting the ordinance of God. Dante's political faith is expounded in the *De Monarchia*, some account of which is given below (Chap. III.). The date of the composition of this work has been much disputed; the most probable opinion connects it with Henry VII.'s coming to Italy, and it may perhaps be assigned to 1309-10.

On 31st March 1311 Dante had written a letter (*Epistola*, vi., *Latin Works* p. 316), addressed "To the most wicked Florentines within the city," asserting the universal and paramount authority of the emperor, and threatening them with the calamities in which his wrath would overwhelm them. Florence, however, far from submitting to Henry, had entered into close alliance with the French king Robert of Naples, and the other Guelf cities of Tuscany; and the government, in order to strengthen their position, recalled a number of exiles in September of this same year, 1311. But from this amnesty Dante was, with others, expressly excepted, doubtless on account of the letter last referred to. The emperor did not attempt to attack Florence, but went to Genoa, where he arrived on 31st October, and thence to Pisa; from which city he started on 23rd April 1312 for Rome, accompanied by the Cardinals deputed

to crown him by Clement V., who had removed the Papal Court to Avignon. In May Henry reached Rome, where he was crowned in the half-ruined Lateran instead of in S. Peter's, which was in the hands of the adherents of King Robert. On his way northward he attacked Florence, but was beaten off; and in August 1313 he died at Buonconvento, near Siena.

In the spring of 1315 it was intimated to Dante that, if he would pay a sum of money and undergo the humiliating ceremony of "oblation" at the altar as a released prisoner, he might be reinstated. His reply was an indignant refusal. Addressing his correspondent, he says: "This is not the way to return to my country, my father.¹ But if another way can be found, first by you and then by others, which shall not taint Dante's fame and honour, that way I will accept and with no reluctant steps. But if Florence is not to be entered by any such way, never will I enter Florence. What of that? May I not everywhere behold the mirrors of the sun and stars? Can I not contemplate the sweetest verities anywhere under heaven unless I first give myself back to the city an inglorious, nay, ignominious [spectacle] to the Florentine people?"

On 6th November in the same year a fresh sentence against Dante was put forth by the Government of Florence, in which he and his sons were sentenced to be beheaded if they should come into the hands of Ranieri of Orvieto, Vicar in Tuscany of King Robert of Naples

¹ Translation from critical text published by A. della Torre in *Bullettino* above cited, xii. 122. Della Torre shows that the letter was probably addressed to Dante's wife's brother, Teruccio, son of Manetto Donati, a Religious, and a Bachelor of Divinity (*ib.* 160).

on whom, in 1313, the Florentines had conferred the government of their city for five years.

The closing period of Dante's life was spent under the protection of Can Grande della Scala, at Verona, whose kindness to him is commemorated in a well-known passage of the *Paradiso* (xvii. 76 ff.), and of Guido Novello of Polenta, the Lord of Ravenna. This was probably the happiest time of his life after his exile. During these years he finished his great work, the Comedy. Guido Novello, a nephew of Francesca of Rimini whose tragic end furnishes one of the most celebrated episodes in the poem, was something of a poet himself. Dante's son, Pietro, was incumbent of two churches in the city; his other son, Jacopo, and his daughter, Beatrice, were also near him.

By the early part of 1320 the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* had been published—as publication was understood in those days. The first-fruits of Dante's poetic renown among the vulgar were rather curious. Boccaccio tells us that one day as Dante was passing a group of women at Verona, one of them remarked to her companions, "Do you see the man who goes to Hell and comes back when he likes, and brings news to those above of those who are below?" "Yes," said a neighbour; "don't you see how his beard is frizzled and how dark his complexion is from the smoke and heat that are down below?" Dante (Boccaccio adds) overheard the dialogue and passed on with a faint smile, not altogether displeased (Wicksteed, *Early Lives of Dante*, pp. 53, 54). Another evidence of notoriety must have been less agreeable to the poet, for it seems that in 1319 or 1320 an attempt was made (or at any rate talked of) to induce Dante in the capacity of a reputed sorcerer to participate in some magical practices set on foot by

Matteo Visconti, Lord of Milan, and Galeazzo, his son, against Pope John XXII.¹

A pleasant glimpse of Dante's life at Ravenna is afforded in the poetic correspondence between him and Giovanni del Virgilio (so called from his devotion to the great Augustan poet), a professor of Bologna. Giovanni had read and admired the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*, but was distressed that such noble themes should be handled in the vernacular. Accordingly, late in 1319, he addressed a poetical Latin epistle to Dante, urging him not to cast his pearls before swine, but rather to compose a Latin epic on some great contemporary theme, e.g. the siege of Genoa by Robert of Naples. In return, he, Del Virgilio, promises to crown him with glory in Bologna. To these proposals Dante replied in a charming pastoral eclogue, in which, with half-playful, half-melancholy sarcasm, he declines his admirer's offer. It seems from this eclogue that Dante (masquerading as Tityrus) and his friend Dino Perini (Melibœus) were engaged in teaching of some sort, the exact nature of which is uncertain, when Giovanni del Virgilio's (Mopsus') letter arrived. "Tell me what it's about," says Dino Perini. Dante, with a laugh, tries to put him off by saying that it dealt with high matters far above the range of his (Perini's) capacity. "Oh, never mind about that," says Dino; "do tell me, for perchance I might understand something, and even impart somewhat of it to my wanton goats" (the pupils). Then Dante tells him that Giovanni del Virgilio invites him to be crowned with laurel at Bologna. "Will you not accept the offer?" asks Dino. But Dante explains that he would rather await his recall to Florence and be

¹ See Paget Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, 4th ed., 101, 102, and article in the *Times* of 28th May 1910.

crowned there ; and adds that he is confident that this will come to pass when once the *Paradiso* is made public—if Del Virgilio will kindly give his consent. “How is Del Virgilio to be won over ?” asks Dino, “Why,” says Dante, “I will presently send him ten cantos of the *Paradiso*, and perhaps he may find there something not altogether unworthy of the Muses.”¹

Del Virgilio was delighted with Dante’s reply, and, in an answering eclogue, hailed Dante as another Virgil. A second eclogue, purporting to be addressed by Dante to Del Virgilio, is preserved, but it is doubtful how far, if at all, it is genuine. It is said to have only been conveyed to Del Virgilio after Dante’s death, by Dante’s son.

It may now, thanks to the investigations of Biagi,² be confidently asserted that in January 1320 Dante was at Verona, where, on the 20th of that month, he held a discussion on the relative positions of the two elements, Water and Earth (a subject much disputed about at that time), at a clerical meeting in S. Helen’s chapel, adjoining the cathedral. (It would seem that some members of the Chapter had opposed his application for the use of the building to hold the discussion in.) He preserved the record of the discussion in his short treatise, *De Aqua et Terra* (Temple Classics, *Latin Works of Dante*, p. 389), which we may now without hesitation accept as genuine.

It appears that in August 1321 the Republic of Venice was threatening reprisals against Ravenna for damage done to their shipping, and organising a league of the cities of Romagna to enforce the claim. Dante was sent to Venice on a mission whose object was to

¹ It should be mentioned that the correct interpretation of this passage of the Eclogue, lines 57–66 (*Latin Works of Dante*, p. 376), is very much disputed.

² V. Biagi, *La Quæstio de Aqua et Terra* (Modena, 1907).

pacify the Republic ; and we are told by Filippo Villani in his life of the poet, that Dante died of a fever aggravated by the land journey back from Venice through the marshy country at the mouth of the Po, the Venetians having refused him permission to return by sea, though he had asked to be allowed to do so on account of his illness. His death occurred on 21st September 1321, not long after his arrival at Ravenna. He was buried at the Franciscan convent, the honours of a public funeral being conferred upon him by Guido Novello, who himself pronounced an elaborate discourse on the occasion. The tomb of Dante has a very remarkable history of its own, embracing the clandestine removal of his remains by the friars of the convent, and their extraordinary and most opportune discovery on 27th May 1865, during the celebration of the 600th anniversary of Dante's birth.¹

In spite of his occasional inaccuracy, and of his habit of rhetorical embellishment, Boccaccio was a very well-informed and painstaking biographer ; and the great value of his *Life of Dante* is now, after a period of undue depreciation, generally acknowledged. His description of the poet's appearance will therefore be read with interest. "He was of middle height, and when he had reached maturity he went ever somewhat bowed, his gait grave and gentle, and ever clad in most seemly apparel, in such garb as befitted his ripe years. His face was long, his nose aquiline, and his eyes rather large than small ; his jaws big, and the under lip protruding beyond the upper. His complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black and curling, and his expression was ever melancholy and thoughtful" (Wicksteed, *Early Lives of Dante*, p. 53).

¹ For details, see Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri*, p. 109 ff.

CHAPTER II

DANTE AS A LYRIC POET

WHEN Dante in his youth began his career as a lyric poet, he had no long literary tradition behind him, as indeed he says himself (*Vita Nuova*, § 25). In a well-known passage of the *Purgatorio* (xxvi. 97) he traces his poetical descent no further back than from Guido Guinicelli (born about 1230, died before 1300), whom he there hails as "the father of himself and of those others his betters who ever used sweet and graceful rhymes of love." The fact is, that the earlier Italians had started the vernacular lyric poetry under a double disadvantage—a lack of ideas and the absence of a literary language. Accordingly for their subject-matter they could only feebly imitate the lyric poetry of the Troubadours, which, after a long and brilliant bloom, was now withering, and finally expired in Dante's time in the person of Guiraut Riquier, commonly known as the last of the Troubadours (d. 1292). The peculiar social conditions in which the Troubadours' lyric poetry had flourished in the courts of the nobility in Southern France had been swept away by the Albigensian War, which raged intermittently from 1209 till 1229; and the treatment of the theme of love by the later Troubadours, many of whom betook themselves to the courts of North Italy, had necessarily become stilted and conventional; so that they furnished bad models

for their Italian imitators. The most meritorious compositions of these later Troubadours were indeed not about love at all, but dealt with moral, political, and personal topics.

But the Troubadours were adepts in the use of a singularly beautiful literary language—the old Provençal—and one which lent itself readily to the most elaborate metrical devices. The versification of the Troubadours is so perfect as to render enjoyable the perusal of poems which have but little else to recommend them. Here, imitation on the part of the Italians was impossible; and we are therefore not surprised to find that some of the earlier lyric poets of that nation wrote in Provençal, of whom (thanks to Dante) Sordello is the best known; while the others used their ungainly local dialects. The unsuitableness of these dialects as a vehicle for poetic expression is discussed by Dante in the first book of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*; and in c. 17 he tells us that the literary language, which he did so much to bring to perfection, had been produced by a deliberate selection by the best poets (those whom he there styles “illustrious”) of the most suitable materials from the various local dialects; though in fact it was mainly based on the speech of Tuscany (see *De Vulg. El.* i. 16: 60–63 n.). The formation of this language had been begun by the poets of the “Sicilian” school, who are so described because they enjoyed the favour and patronage of the Emperor Frederick II. (1220–1250), who was also King of Sicily in his mother’s right. “They represented the beginning of art and of a literary tradition”;¹ and it is to their efforts to establish a

¹ Gaspary, *Hist. of Early Italian Literature*, p. 67 (Elsner’s trans.).

literary vernacular that Dante refers when he says (*De Vulg. El.* I. 12: 8, 30-33) that "whatever poetry the Italians write is called Sicilian."

We have seen how Dante's genius enabled him to divine the future in store for vernacular literature. His common-sense convinced him that it was absolutely necessary to complete the formation of a standard literary language fit to express the noblest thoughts, and that it was not less necessary that the poets using this language should discipline their utterances by strictly conforming them to the rules of versification as settled by the practice of the most eminent writers.

These convictions moved him to plan the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which was (in part) intended to justify the vernacular as a means of poetic expression, even as what we may call the companion work, the *Convivio*, was intended to justify its use in treating of the most profound speculations in prose. But the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* was apparently designed to be something much more than a mere *Ars Poetica*; for in its opening sentence the author expresses his purpose to treat of "the science of the vernacular" in general; and in the last sentence of the first book he declares his intention to be, after discussing the highest literary form of the language, "to throw light on the lower vernaculars, gradually coming down to that which belongs to a single family."

It was Dante's perception of the dignity of the vernacular and his consequent anxiety to "screw up" the vernacular poets to the pitch of the classic poets of Rome (see *De Vulg. El.* II. 4, and cf. *Vita Nuova*, § 25) which made him insist so strongly on technical excellence, and pour contempt on Guittone of Arezzo and

various other contemporary poets, "who have never got out of the habit of being plebeian in words and construction" (*De Vulg. El.* II. 6: 85: cf. I. 13: 7).

It appears from Book II. of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* that Dante, at the time when he was writing it, regarded the *Canzone*, or Ode (the Italian representative of the Provençal *chanso*), as the highest form of poetry, and the only worthy vehicle of what he pronounces to be the highest themes, viz. Arms, Love, and Righteousness,¹ and held that these themes must be handled subject to all the minute verbal, metrical, and musical restrictions which the use of that form involved. For instance, the choice of words available for use in *Canzoni* was much restricted, and only the noblest might be employed. (See the very curious classification of words in *De Vulg. El.* II. 7.) It seems impossible to suppose that he could have laid down such a doctrine had he had any conception of a vernacular poem of the character and dimensions of the Comedy; and we may perhaps attribute the non-completion of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in part at least, to the enlargement of his poetic vision which wider experience brought him. He found, for example, among other things, that he could not handle the highest subjects adequately if he blotted out half his vocabulary.

Turning now from language to subject-matter, let us look at the famous lines in the *Purgatorio* (xxiv. 49) where Bonagiunta of Lucca (contemptuously mentioned with Guittone in the passage of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* I. 13: 7) addresses Dante in these words:

¹ In the earlier days of the *Vita Nuova* Dante seems to have thought that Love alone was a fitting subject for vernacular poetry (§ 25).

“But tell me if I see here him who brought forth the new rhymes beginning ‘Ladies, who have understanding of Love.’” And I (Dante) to him: “I am one who, when Love inspires me, mark, and utter in that way that he dictates within.” “O brother,” said he, “now I see the knot that kept back the Notary, and Guittone, and me, on this side of the sweet new style that I hear. I see well how that your pens follow close upon him who dictates, which was certainly not the case with ours.”

Coupling this passage with the one (*Purg.* xxvi. 97-99) quoted at the beginning of this chapter, we learn that Guido Guinicelli was the founder of this new school; and we observe that Dante in the person of Bonagiunta brings forward the first of the odes in the *Vita Nuova* as a typical specimen of a new style of poetry, whose characteristic is, that the pens of its representatives immediately set forth the inspiration of Love, whereas the poetry of the older school consisted of a vapid reproduction of worn-out phrases, and, far from being inspired by Love, was rooted in conventionality.¹ Now, if any one read the lines just now quoted without any knowledge of the Ode *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*, or any other poems in that style, he might very well suppose that the productions of this new school might resemble such expressions of simple passion as Burns' lines to Mary Morison, or, to take an example nearer to Dante's time, the beautiful little piece *A la fontana del vergier* of the early trou-

¹ Bonagiunta's poems, Nos. LIV., LVI., LVII., in Butler's *The Fore-runners of Dante* are very characteristic of the older school. No. LVI. (*Gioia nè ben non è senza conforto*) is translated by Rossetti in Temple Classics *Early Italian Poets*, p. 57.

badour Marcabru.¹ But on opening the *Vita Nuova* he would find that this is not the case at all. The ode in question is indeed exquisitely beautiful, and written under the inspiration of love; but it is a love which has little or nothing of passion in it; and furthermore, the poem is esoteric—that is to say, only intended to be intelligible to a particular class of persons, namely, the initiated (see lines 9–12 of the “envoy”): consequently it cannot be thoroughly comprehended at a glance. Moreover, technical terms of scholastic philosophy (*intelletto, atto*) appear in it. In short, it breathes an atmosphere of philosophic mysticism.

Wherein, then, do the “sweetness” and “novelty” of the style consist? The former term probably refers to the beauty of the language arising from the perfect mastery of the “illustrious vernacular,” which can only be appreciated by a comparison in the original of Dante’s lyrical poems with the productions of poets of the earlier style.² Next, as to the novelty claimed by Dante for the style established by Guido Guinicelli. In the first place, we find that the claim to write under the direct inspiration of love was no new thing, for the same claim had long before been made by the Troubadours, with whose lyrics Dante was intimately acquainted. Thus Bernart de Ventadorn, who flourished a century before Dante, declares that “song can scarce be of any worth unless the song proceed from the heart, nor can song proceed from the heart unless pure and sincere love be there.”³ And again, “It is

¹ Dejeanne, *Poésies complètes du troubadour Marcabru*, p. 3, translated in *The Lives of the Troubadours*, by Ida Farnell, p. 22.

² Specimens of these will be found in A. J. Butler’s *The Fore-runners of Dante*. ³ Mahn, *Werke der Troubadours*, i. p. 33.

no wonder if I sing better than any other singer, for my heart follows closer after Love, and I am more obedient to him.”¹ And the Monk of Montaudon: “I assert that song would be worth very little if it proceeded not from love.”² And Arnaut Daniel (of whom more presently) goes farther, and says that Love not only inspires him, but helps him in composition.³

Not only do we find Dante’s claim in general to the direct inspiration of love apparently anticipated by the Troubadours, but we notice an apparent identity in the sentiments expressed by him and by them. Thus in the second stanza of *Donne ch’avete* we find Dante representing the saints and angels in paradise entreating God to make heaven perfect by summoning thither the soul of “Madonna.” Even so the troubadour Ponz de Capduoill in his dirge on the death of the lady Azalais de Mercœur declares that the angels above are exulting over her death, and awards her a seat in heaven above all other women.⁴ And elsewhere⁵ the same poet declares, in speaking of a certain lady Beatrice, that all the angels are rejoicing for love of her. In the third stanza Dante says (Rossetti’s translation) :

“My lady is desired in the high heaven ;
Wherefore it now behoveth me to tell,
Saying : Let any maid [it should be ‘lady’] that would
be well

¹ Appel, *Provenzalische Chrestomathie*, p. 55 (2nd ed.).

² Philippson, *Der Mönch von Montaudon*, p. 25.

³ Canello, *La vita e le opere del trovatore Arnaldo Daniello*, p. 108.

⁴ Von Napski, *Leben u. Werke des Trobadors Ponz de Capduoill*, pp. 86, 87.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 75.

Esteemed, keep with her ; for as she goes by
Into foul hearts a deathly chill is driven
By Love, that makes ill thoughts to perish there :
While any who endures to gaze on her
Must either be ennobled, or else die."

In the same way the troubadour Peire Rogier declares concerning his lady, "that there is none so ill-conditioned but would become chivalrous, however much of a churl he might have been before, did he but speak a word or two with her."¹ And Ponz de Capduoill, addressing the object of his homage, says, "The greatest churl is, when he sees you, chivalrous, and bears you good faith."² Sordello declares, with regard to the lady whose praise he is singing, that all the most excellent ladies ought to yield her obedience, for that she is their guide to excellence, even as the pole-star guides the ships, and the magnet draws the iron (De Lollis, *Vita e poesie di Sordello di Goito*, p. 178). And Aimeric de Pegulhan, whom Dante quotes in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, says in reference to his love that "many a time it keeps him from baseness from which he could not otherwise keep himself."³

Now these resemblances are certainly striking, but if we read the Troubadours' poems in full, from which these extracts are taken, we shall be struck by the profound difference between their point of view and that of Dante in the Ode *Donne ch'avete*. We shall see that in the Troubadours' lyrics the thought is not developed at all (except in Aimeric de Pegulhan's poem, which seems to have a truer ring than the others), and

¹ Appel, *Das Leben u. die Lieder des Trobadors Peire Rogier*, p. 55.

² Von Napolski, *op. cit.* 60.

³ Monaci, *Testi antichi provenzali*, 60.

that there is very little at the back of these high-sounding phrases. They are neatly turned compliments, and that is about all. They are written from the standpoint of the poet of chivalrous love who pays homage to a mistress whose praise he has made it his business to sing, and from whom he desires something in return. Peire Rogier's piece just now quoted is absolutely typical. He goes on in the next stanza, "I think nor ponder of nothing else, nor have I desire or wish but concerning how I might serve her and do all that she likes and that pleases her, for I believe that I never was made for aught else but to do what might please her; for well I know that all I do for love of her is honour and advantage for me." And then, at the end of the piece, his aim is disclosed, viz. that he may "enjoy her."

Even so Arnaut Daniel in the *chanso* above quoted declares in his bombastic way that unless his mistress makes up for her ill-treatment of him "by a kiss before the new year, she kills him, and dooms herself to hell." Now observe that this, though in a very much purified form, is the attitude of Dante himself in that part of the *Vita Nuova* preceding the crisis described in § 18, which leads up to the ode *Donne ch'avete* in § 19. The *Ballata* in § 12, for instance, might almost have been written by one of the earlier Troubadours. Ponz de Capduoill's poem quoted above is, in fact, a composition of exactly the same kind, i.e. an apology to an offended mistress. In the ode *La dispietata mente* (Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, No. xi. p. 260), which belongs to this early period of Dante's "new life," he too prays for the reward of his mistress's salutation. But in *Donne ch'avete* the whole point of view is altered. The poem

is not directly addressed to the object of Dante's homage at all, and the simple phrases of the old Troubadours are developed into a magnificent ode, in which the glorious attributes of Beatrice are treated almost impersonally. Far from claiming or expecting any reward for his devotion, he wishes that all who are worthy may "prove her virtue" and be eternally blessed through her. Here we have the chivalrous love of the Troubadours raised, so to speak, to a higher power; and it is in this ampler conception of the love inspired by woman that the novelty of the "new style" appears to consist. This ampler conception may be further illustrated by the following sonnet (*Vita Nuova*, § 27, Rossetti's translation):

"For certain he hath seen all perfectness
Who among other ladies hath seen mine:
They that go with her humbly should combine
To thank their God for such peculiar grace.
So perfect is the beauty of her face
That it begets in no wise any sign
Of envy, but draws round her a clear line
Of love and blessed faith, and gentleness.
Merely the sight of her makes all things bow:
Not she herself alone is holier
Than all; but hers, through her, are raised above,
From all her acts such lovely graces flow
That truly one may never think of her
Without a passion of exceeding love."

The philosophic aspect of the poetry of the "new style" is illustrated by the following sonnet (*Vita Nuova*, § 20, Rossetti's translation), with its reference to the founder of the school (Guido Guinicelli) in line 2:

" Love and the gentle heart are one same thing,
 Even as the wise man in his ditty saith :
 Each, of itself, would be such life in death
 As rational soul bereft of reasoning.
 'Tis Nature makes them when she loves : a king
 Love is, whose palace where he sojourneth
 Is called the Heart ; there draws he quiet breath
 At first, with brief or longer slumbering.
 Then beauty seen in virtuous womankind
 Will make the eyes desire, and through the heart
 Send the desiring of the eyes again ;
 Where often it abides so long enshrined
 That Love at length out of his sleep will start.
 And women feel the same for worthy men."

The first two stanzas of Guinicelli's ode may now be given :

" Within the gentle heart Love shelters him
 As birds within the green shade of the grove.
 Before the gentle heart, in nature's scheme,
 Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.
 For with the sun, at once,
 So sprang the light immediately ; nor was
 Its birth before the sun's.
 And Love hath his effect in gentleness
 Of very self ; even as
 Within the middle fire the heat's excess.
 The fire of Love comes to the gentle heart
 Like as its virtue to a precious stone ;
 To which no star its influence can impart
 Till it is made a pure thing by the sun :
 For when the sun hath smit
 From out its essence that which there was vile,
 The star endoweth it.
 And so the heart created by God's breath
 Pure, true, and clean from guile,
 A woman, like a star, enamoureth." ¹

¹ Rossetti's translation (Temple Classics, *Early Italian Poets*, p. 21).

On the philosophic background of this ode, Vittorio Rossi remarks in a lecture on the *Dolce stil nuovo*:¹ "The principle of spiritual love, so he (Guinicelli) reasoned, treading in the footsteps of S. Thomas Aquinas, is the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness, imagined, seen in glimpses, or perceived by intuition through the veil of the body. But such contemplation suffices not to produce that union of affection between the loving soul and the beloved, which is Love, unless the former be disposed by nature to deck itself with the spiritual beauty which shines already in the latter. Love, conceived as a cause of virtue, as a stimulus to the habitual practice of good, cannot arise where that disposition is wanting, that is to say, where 'gentleness of heart' is not, which thing is an inborn disposition to virtue." To this may be added an observation by another eminent Dantist, E. G. Parodi. "Two great traditions," he says,² "flow together in the New Style: the poetic tradition of the Troubadours and the scientific tradition of the Scholastic Philosophy. In the former, the object of rational and noble love is woman, in the latter, God. The 'new rhymes' reconcile the two opposite tendencies, by making woman the symbol of a Higher Essence and embodying in her the Divine."

We have seen that the characteristic feature of the "New Style" is the treatment of chivalrous love from the philosophical point of view. But Dante was not content to rest there, and in five poems (Sonnet I., Ballata IV., Odes II., III., IX. in the Temple Classics *Canzoniere*) he goes a step further, and in some sort

¹ *Lectura Dantis: Le Opere Minori*, p. 42.

² *Bullettino* cited, XI. 171

reverses the procedure, applying to Philosophy the language of chivalrous love, much in the same way that some of the later Troubadours, under the stress of the Inquisition and the influence of the religious revival wrought by the preaching of the Friars, adapted the language of love to religion, and hymned the Virgin in the same strains in which their predecessors had lauded the ladies of their poetic homage.¹ The starting-point for Dante's new adventure was, however, most likely Boëthius' account of the relations between him and *his* Lady Philosophy (*cf.* above, p. 12.) Probably Dante succeeded as well as any one could do in such a difficult undertaking, but one cannot quite get rid of a sense of unreality in reading these compositions; and they have the drawback of needing an elaborate commentary such as Dante has himself provided for one of them in *Convivio*, tr. III. Two stanzas are here quoted as specimens: the first is the second stanza of Ode III. in Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, the second is the third stanza of Ode IX. The translation is by the late Dr. Plumptre.²

“The Sun, that all the world encompasseth,
 Sees nothing half so lovely any hour,
 As when he shines where resteth in her bower
 The Lady for whose praise my tongue Love frees.
 Each spirit high sees her and wondereth,
 And all the tribe that here own Love's sweet power,
 Shall find her presence as their thoughts' high dower,
 When Love gives them perception of her peace;
 So doth her nature Him who gives it please,

¹ See, as to this curious transformation, Joseph Anglade, *Les Troubadours*, p. 212 ff.

² Dante, *The Minor Poems*, pp. 133, 125.

Who aye in her His virtue doth infuse
Beyond our Nature's utmost claim or plea.

The soul of purity,
Which this great grace of healing power imbues,
That gift displays, in that which it doth guide,
For her fair form is that which eyesight views ;
And still their eyes who in her light abide
Send envoys to the heart whose wishes rise
In the clear air, and take the form of sighs.

"Full true is Love which thus hath captured me
And bindeth me full fast,
Since I would do for him what now I say ;
For no love with that love compared may be,
Which finds its joy at last
In death, another's wishes to obey :
And over me such purpose held its sway,
As soon as that strong passion, in its might,
Was born from the exceeding great delight
Of her fair face in whom all beauty dwells.
Her slave am I, and when my fond thoughts stray
On what she is, I am contented quite.
For well against his will may man serve right ;
And if my youth all hope of prize repels.
I wait a time when reason shall mature,
If only life may long enough endure."

The poems we have last been speaking of must, of course, be distinguished from those which, as stated above (pp. 17, 18), were not primarily composed in honour of "My Lady Philosophy," but were afterwards expounded, or intended to be expounded, as if they had been so composed : for instance, Ode xv. in Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, on which *Convivio* tr. II. is a commentary (see *Convivio*, p. 434).

We turn now to that small group of Odes, already

briefly mentioned above (p. 13), in which we see Dante in a frame of mind equally remote from the mystic raptures of the *Vita Nuova* and from the enthusiastic pursuit of Philosophy depicted in the poems we have last considered. We see him now a man of flesh and blood carried away by a consuming passion of no ideal or transcendental nature. The Odes in question are *Io son venuto al punto della rota* (Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, p. 254), the sestina *Al poco giorno* (*ib.* 178), the so-called "double sestina" *Amor, tu vedi ben* (*ib.* 206), and *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro* (*ib.* 212). The Sonnet *E' non è legno di sì forti nocchi* (*ib.* 160) also belongs to the same period.

The sixth stanza of *Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro* will give some idea of the spirit of these poems :

"And if I had those tresses in my hand,
Which are as rod or scourge that makes me mourn,
I would grasp them at morn,
And hold them till the bells of evensong.
Nor would I piteous be, nor gently bland,
But, like a bear at play, act out my scorn ;
And if by Love's scourge torn,
For vengeance thousand-fold should I be strong ;
And on her bright eyes, whence the flashes throng
That set on fire the heart I bear half-slain,
I would my fixed glance strain,
To 'venge me for the flight that wrought my pain,
And then with Love would grant her peace again."¹

In these Odes the influence of the troubadour Arnaut Daniel (fl. 1180-1200) is strongly perceptible. We may conjecture that Arnaut's poems, in which there is a marked strain of sensuality, would be repugnant to the

¹ Plumptre's translation, *Minor Poems*, p. 89.

Dante of the *Vita Nuova* ; and his falling under Arnaut's influence at the period of his life when he wrote these poems is not without significance. In the first place we may notice in all the four odes and in the sonnet Dante's persistent playing on the word *pietra* (stone), which has been taken as an indication that Pietra was the name of the lady by whom he had been so infatuated. A similar though less persistent playing on the word *laura* by Arnaut suggests that the poems in which it occurs were inspired by a lady named Laura. To come to more important points. A remarkable feature of the *Vita Nuova* poems and of those in honour of Philosophy is the rarity of the allusions in them to the phenomena of Nature. This at once distinguishes them on the one hand from the Troubadours' lyrics, where at least a perfunctory reference to the time of year was usually inserted, and on the other hand from the *Pietra* poems, not to mention the Comedy. The ode *Io son venuto* is in this respect the most noteworthy of the four ; it has five stanzas, in every one of which there is an elaborate description of the phenomena of Nature in winter, concluding with an application of it to the poet's firm resolve not to give up the love of his "stony" mistress. The general scheme of the poem, as will be seen at a glance, is simply the old Provençal formula that in spite of the deadness of Nature the poet's soul is still on fire with love. But how far does Dante surpass any Provençal model ! His passion, we can feel, is no mere conventional posture of mind ; his natural descriptions are no mere general statements, but are worked out in detail. That which in Arnaut Daniel is but an introduction to a poem becomes in Dante an essential part of its structure, and is elaborated

to a degree unparalleled in Provençal lyrics. A further point of interest in this ode is that Dante seems in it to be feeling his way towards the sestina, for we find that the last line of every stanza and of the envoy ends with the same word as the line before. The words are *pietra*, *donna*, *tempo*, *sempre*, *dolce*, *marmo*; and the first three reappear as end-words in the ode *Amor, tu vedi ben*.

The sestina is a direct imitation (with two slight modifications) of that by Arnaut Daniel, who probably invented this form. Rhyme is discarded, and the same six words are used as line-endings in every one of the six stanzas according to a particular scheme. Dante's sestina, considered as a poem, is immeasurably superior to its model. It possesses, indeed, as Rossetti says, "great and peculiar beauty," whereas Arnaut's can scarcely claim to be anything else but an ingenious exercise in metrical gymnastics.

How Dante could triumph over the restrictions of poetic form is still more apparent in the ode *Amor, tu vedi ben*. It is sometimes described as a "double sestina," which is a misnomer, seeing that *five* and not *six* is the numerical basis of the composition. It is a veritable *tour de force*. Five words only are used as line-endings; there are five stanzas each of twelve lines of eleven syllables, and an envoy of six lines. The end-words, *donna*, *tempo*, *luce*, *freddo*, *pietra*, are disposed according to a formula developed from that of the sestina. In every stanza one of the end-words is used six times, two are used twice, and two are used once. The theme is again the same, the poet bewailing the obduracy of his mistress and asserting the constancy of his passion; but his courage seems to be

failing, and there is a note of despondency which is absent from the two previous poems. It can scarcely be claimed that this is the most beautiful of Dante's lyrics, but it is not without a certain charm, and one can only marvel at a genius which, under such extraordinary restrictions, could produce anything worthy to be called poetry at all. Dante, as we know from the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* II. 13, and from the envoy of the poem itself where he alludes to its unheard-of form, took considerable pride in his achievement.

In the fourth ode *Così nel mio parlar* the poet's hopeless passion reaches its climax ; and here no specific influence of Arnaut Daniel seems to be traceable. It is far beyond anything that he could attain to. The artifices of the three preceding odes are laid aside, and the structure of the stanza is relatively simple.

In Dante's three ethical odes, viz. *Doglia mi reca* (Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, No. VII., p. 220), *Le dolci rime*, on which *Convivio* IV. is a comment (*ib.* No. XII., p. 266), and *Poscia ch' Amor* (*ib.* No. XIII., p. 280), the fire of poetic inspiration burns lower than in any other of his work. The indirect influence of Arnaut Daniel may perhaps be traced here in the extreme complication of the structure of the stanzas, and in the varied length of the lines, both which features are characteristic of him. In *Poscia ch' Amor* we have lines of eleven, seven, five, and three syllables, the last-named forming part of lines of eleven syllables as explained in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* II. 12. As Carducci observes (*Studi letterari*, pp. 103, 104), "In these compositions the striving after difficulties without obtaining any corresponding artistic effect is all too evident ; for the integral harmony of the stanza is lost in prolixity, while

its unity is disturbed by the mixture of too large a number of shorter lines with lines of eleven syllables, and by the profuseness (*lusso*) of the rhymes." On the other hand, it must be admitted that the great variety in the length of the lines in *Poscia ch' Amor* gives a vigour and animation to the stanza which the theme of the poem (a denunciation of the wickedness of the world) seems to demand.

The stanzas in these Odes are, in fact, of excessive length: *Doglia mi reca* has 21 lines in a stanza and 158 in the whole poem; *Le dolci rime*, 21 and 146; *Poscia ch' Amor*, 19 and 133. Contrast these figures with those of the three complete Odes in the *Vita Nuova*. *Donne ch'avete* and *Donna pietosa* have each but 14 lines in a stanza and 84 in the whole. *Gli occhi dolenti* also has 14 lines in a stanza and only 76 in the whole. Dante unfortunately left off the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* just at the point when he was going to explain the principles determining the length of the stanza.

The passage of the *Purgatorio* (xxvi. 115-120) in which the high praise meted out to Arnaut Daniel by Dante is accompanied by a contemptuous reference to a poet who enjoys a far higher reputation, Giraut de Bornelh, reminds one of Macaulay's "almost universal rule that good poets are bad critics." We can only suppose that Dante who, as appears from the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (b. II), attached the utmost importance to technical excellence in poetry, was, in his admiration for Arnaut's unrivalled dexterity in versification, disposed to be a little blind to his shortcomings in other directions. And as to the scornful depreciation of Giraut de Bornelh, it must not be forgotten that in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (II. 2) this very poet is

chosen out from among the Troubadours as the singer of righteousness, a title which in the same passage Dante boldly claims for himself among the poets of Italy. And, indeed, Giraut was not unworthy of the distinction here conferred upon him. His poems have a moral and even at times a religious tone, which is conspicuously absent from the Troubadour lyrics in general; and besides, his was a real poetic genius, which, now that his complete poems have at length been published,¹ will, it is to be hoped, receive more general recognition. These circumstances, and perhaps a certain similarity in the careers of the two poets, attracted Dante to Giraut. Giraut, even as Dante, was a student, and knew moreover, even as Dante knew, what it was to suffer the loss of all his property including his precious books;² as Dante had seen the "ruin" of Florence (*Convivio* II. 14: 177), so Giraut, who lived on till 1220, had witnessed the downfall of the chivalrous society which for many years he had delighted with his songs; and had seen the knightly ideal sink from prowess in the tourney to cattle-driving, sacrilege, and highway robbery.³ Giraut had felt the intolerable humiliation of "being beholden to many" (*Obs m'agra*, stanza 2, Kolsen, I. 422) just as Dante knew the bitterness of having to stoop to receive the gift of a grudging giver. After such an experience, he declares, a refusal ceases to be bitter (*Doglia mi reca*, stanza 6).

¹ *Sämmtliche Lieder des Trobadors Giraut de Bornelh*. Von A. Kolsen (Halle, 1910) (with German translation). A second volume containing commentary, glossary, &c., is promised.

² Chabaneau, *Biographies des Troubadours*, p. 16, n. 3.

³ *Per solatz revelhar*, stanza 3 (Kolsen, I., 414; Chaytor, *Troubadours of Dante*, 35, 36).

If the "Pietra" odes are in some sort traceable to the inspiration of Arnaut Daniel, the ethical odes undoubtedly betray the influence of Giraut de Bornelh, as may be seen by comparing them with *Per solatz revelhar, Si per mon Sobre-Totz no fos* (both quoted in the *De Vulg. El.*), or any other of Giraut's ethical pieces. *Poscia ch' Amor* in particular might be called an attempt by Dante to write in Giraut's manner, and the resemblance between them is here enhanced by the occurrence in the second stanza of Dante's ode of the Provençalisms *missione* for *spesa*, *fallenza* for *fallimento*, and *coraggi* for *cuori*; while in the first stanza the words *gioioso*, *noioso* are translations of *joios*, *enojos*, which one might almost call technical terms of the language of chivalrous love.

Giraut, again, in *Molt era dolz e plazens* (Kolsen, I. 408), preaches a doctrine concerning the nature of nobility which is entirely in accordance with Dante's in *Le dolci rime*, though he does not argue the question out.

In the poem *Lo dolz chans d'un auzel* (Kolsen, I. 348) Giraut introduces a variation into the treatment of the decay of chivalry, the subject with which his ethical compositions are concerned. He here represents that a bird's sweet song made him turn aside one day from his path to a place where, beside a hedge, three maidens were bewailing in their song that very matter—the decline of chivalry—which was so troubling him; and in the rest of the poem the same theme is discussed in a dialogue between the poet and the eldest of the maidens.

This treatment of the subject approved itself to Dante, and he accordingly adopted its main feature—the dramatic form—and, applying Giraut's framework

to his own requirements, developed it into one of the most noteworthy productions of the "New Style"—the ode *Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute* (Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, Ode XIV.). Dante transforms Giraut's three maidens into three mysterious beings, women of surpassing beauty and power; and the interlocutors in the ensuing dialogue are, not the poet—and here note the influence of the New Style—but Love, the inhabitant of the poet's soul, and one of the women, who proclaims herself as Righteousness. The dialogue assumes an allegorical character, and sets forth how that the virtues have been banished from human society, but may look for the restoration of their influence in a regenerated race of men. Then, in the last stanza, the poet himself applies the discourse, to which he has been attentively listening, to his own consolation, amid the misery of his own banishment from Florence. This ode is one of the most impressive, perhaps the most impressive, of Dante's lyrics, but, owing to its esoteric character, the full interpretation of the details of the allegory has more or less baffled the ingenuity of all who have attempted to expound it. The ode has in fact only too well obeyed its author's behest: "My song" (he says in the envoy¹), "let no man on thy robes lay hands,

"To see what lady fair hides from all eyes;
Let parts unveiled suffice;
The sweeter fruit within to all deny."

Account has only here been taken of poems by Dante whose genuineness is undisputed. Among other lyrical

¹ Plumptre's translation, *Minor Poems*, p. 163. The best commentary on the ode is that by Carducci (*Poesia e storia*, p. 7 ff.).

poems attributed to him with greater or less probability the most important is a series of 232 sonnets known as *Il Fiore*, and forming a compendium of the Old French *Roman de la Rose*. Many of these sonnets are of a gross character, and the work, if by Dante, would, like the scurrilous sonnets to Forese Donati,¹ fall within the period of his moral aberration (see above, p. 13). The Dantesque authorship of the *Fiore* is upheld by several authorities, the most eminent among them being d'Ovidio, who suggests that the representation in *Paradiso* xxx., xxxi., of the blessed spirits in heaven as seated within the "sempiternal rose" is nothing less than a solemn act of poetic expiation by Dante for the coarseness and worldliness of the *Fiore* Sonnets. The glory of the heavenly Rose was to blot out the shame of the earthly (*Bullettino* cited, x. 288, 289).

Enough has now been said to enable the reader to form an estimate of the reputation Dante would enjoy among the poets of the world, did that reputation depend upon his lyrics alone. Beautiful as they are, they would be found (the *Pietra* poems perhaps excepted) too esoteric, too much in need of annotation, too evidently stamped with the marks of a particular phase of thought, of a particular literary coterie, to win universal acceptance. Dante, had he left us no other poetry but this, would still rank among the nursing-fathers of Italian song, and take an honoured place in anthologies, but would be chiefly remembered as the foremost of a brilliant group of writers who prepared the way for the supreme glory of Petrarch.

¹ Temple Classics *Canzoniere*, Appendix.

CHAPTER III

DANTE'S POLITICAL IDEAL

DANTE'S political ideal enters so largely into the texture of the Comedy that it will be advisable to give some account of it as formulated in the *De Monarchia*. His starting-point is Aristotle's doctrine that as man is a social animal, man cannot for the purpose of ethics or morality be treated as an individual merely, but must be regarded as an individual forming part of an organised community. "No man," says Dante, "is able to attain felicity by himself without the aid of many, inasmuch as he needs many things which no one is able to provide alone" (*Conv.* iv. 4: 3 ff.). Hence the felicity of the individual is involved in the felicity of humanity, and the question is, what is the goal of man as an aggregate of individuals organised as a community? What, in short, is the first principle of political science, or, as Dante says, "what is the goal of human civilisation as a whole?" It is the realising or actualising of the whole potentiality of the human intellect, *i.e.* of the intellect of humanity as a whole, or in other words, the bringing about of that condition of things in which the intellect of all the individuals in the world would be working together in the most effective manner possible. Now if this statement of the goal of human civilisation be considered carefully;

it will be found to cover the whole ground embraced in the Aristotelian conception of felicity adopted by Dante in *Convivio*, iv. 22, namely, the virtuous exercise of our rational faculties in the active and (so far as may be on earth) in the contemplative life (see *De Mon.* i. 4 : 1-10). But this demands the harmonious development and co-operation of all the several members of the *universal body politic*, since obviously no smaller body, and still less, no individual can realise or actualise the whole potentiality of the human intellect (see *De Mon.* i. 3). Now the first requisite for the attainment of the goal of human civilisation is universal peace. This is Dante's fundamental principle (*De Mon.* i. 4), and he proceeds to argue that, in order to secure universal peace, a temporal monarchy, *i.e.* a temporal ruler over all the world, is necessary. For, since there must be a supreme authority to guide and control, wherever any individuals are acting in combination, if their action is to be efficient, much more is such a supreme authority necessary when it is a question of securing the combined harmonious action of the whole human race in the most efficient manner; in other words, it is necessary for the well-being of the world that there should be a Monarch or Emperor. Further, it is God's intention that all things should resemble Himself in the greatest degree that their nature admits of; and the human race, says Dante, "is most likened to God when it is most one; for it is in Him alone that the absolute principle of the one exists. Wherefore it is written, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one.' But the human race is most one when it is all united in one, which cannot be except when it is subject in its totality to one prince. Therefore it is

when subject to one prince that the human race is most likened to God; and consequently most conforms to the divine intention" (*De Mon.* i. 8: 19 ff.).

But there is a practical reason for the necessity of a monarchy; for, between any two princes neither of whom is subject to the other, contention may arise; and if there is contention, there must be judgment between them; and since neither can judge the other, for a peer has no rule over his peer, there must be a third of wider jurisdiction to whose authority both the disputants may bow; and he will be the Monarch or Emperor, and therefore monarchy is necessary for the world (*De Mon.* i. 10). On this Mr. Wicksteed wisely observes, that Dante's "imperialism does not mean the supremacy of one nation over others, but the existence of a supreme law that can hold all national passions in check" (*Latin Works of Dante*, p. 149).

Furthermore, the world is best disposed when justice is most potent therein; and therefore the supreme temporal sovereign over humanity should have the utmost will and the utmost power to do justice. Now greed is the greatest obstacle to the will to do justice; therefore the sovereign should be free from greed. But the Monarch or Emperor is the only person likely to be free from greed, because, being ruler of all the world, there is nothing left for him to covet (*De Mon.* i. 11: 72 ff.). Moreover, as greed is the foe of justice, so love is its friend or promoter, and the Monarch, more than any other, should be more inclined to love humanity, because he is primarily responsible for the care of it, whereas other princes' charge over their particular subjects is derived from him. "Everything lovable is the more loved the closer it is to the lover. Men are

closer to the monarch than to other princes, therefore they are most loved by him, *or at least they ought to be*" (*De Mon.* i. 11; 113 ff.). (The last words point to some conflict between Dante's logic and his knowledge of human nature.) Thus, since the monarch is likely to have a greater will to do justice than any other man by reason of his greater love for his subjects, and incontestably has greater power to do it, therefore a Monarchy or Empire is necessary for the well-being of the world.

The next argument Dante urges (*De Mon.* i. 12) in proof of the necessity of a Monarch or universal ruler is extremely noteworthy, and demands special attention. The human race, he says, is best disposed when it is most free, and it is most free under a Monarch. The point to be emphasised is, what Dante understands by freedom; it is essential for the right understanding of the Comedy to make this clear (as will be seen below in Ch. IV.). A man is free, in Dante's sense of the word, when his will is in absolute equilibrium, not in the slightest degree weighed down by passion or desire, but free to act in accordance with the judgment of his reason. Freedom, in fact, as understood by Dante, implies *free* judgment in matters of will. "Judgment," says Dante, "is the link between apprehension and appetite [appetite, by the way, includes any desire whether good or evil]. For first a thing is apprehended; then when apprehended, is judged to be good or bad; and finally he who has so judged it, pursues or shuns it. If then the judgment altogether sets the appetite in motion, and is in no measure anticipated by it, it is free. But, if the appetite in any way whatever anticipates the judgment, and the judgment is moved by it, the judgment cannot be free,

because it does not move of itself, but is drawn captive by another. And hence it is that brutes cannot have free judgment, because their judgments are always anticipated by appetite. And hence too it may be seen that the intellectual substances [*i.e.* the Angels] whose wills are immutable, and separated souls [*i.e.* souls separated from the body] departing from this life in grace, do not lose their freedom of choice because of the immutability of their wills, but retain it in its most perfect and most potent form "; and in consequence of this absolute freedom of judgment, their choice is wholly to conform their will to God's. (*De Mom.* I. 12: 17 ff.) Freedom, in short, in Dante's view, is freedom to do what is right; and when we have so disciplined our will that it instinctively and spontaneously conforms itself to God's Will, we are truly free. As F. W. Robertson says, "One whom Christ liberates is free by his own will. It is not that he would, and cannot, but that he can, and will not" (*Sermons*, Series, I. p. 307). Now, Dante argues, humanity is most free when it can exist for its own sake and not for the sake of something else; in other words, when it is free to pursue its goal and is not deflected from it by being enslaved to the greed of its rulers. And it is under a Monarch alone that humanity is most free; for he alone may be presumed to be without greed, and to desire that all men shall be made good; and he alone has the coercive jurisdiction requisite for the amendment of (in Dante's own words) "perverted forms of government, namely democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies, which force the human race into slavery. For, since the monarch has love of men in the highest degree, as already indicated, he will desire all men to be made good, which cannot

be under perverted rulers,"¹ and hence a monarchy is necessary for the well-being of the world. Dante, it is to be noted, perceives that no form of government can be trusted to ensure the freedom of its subjects, and therefore argues that the directing hand of a monarch over them all is needful. Accordingly in his epistle to the Florentines referred to above, (p. 20), where he rebukes them for their resistance to the Emperor Henry VII., he says, "Ye first and alone, *shunning the yoke of liberty* (i.e. of the Imperial Monarchy), have murmured against the glory of the Roman Prince, the king of the world, and the minister of God."² In connection with the argument which we are now considering, Dante lays down the principle which it has taken men many centuries to learn, that governors exist for the sake of the governed, and not the contrary. "It is clear," says he, "that although the consul, or the king, be masters of the rest as regards the *way*, yet as regards the *end* they are their servants; and the Monarch most of all, for he must assuredly be regarded as the servant of all" (*De Mon.* I. 12: 83 ff.).

Next, Dante argues in support of the necessity for a temporal monarch in this way. Nothing can act unless it already is itself that which the thing acted upon is to become (*De Mon.* I. 13: 13), and hence, no one can produce a disposition in another unless that disposition be a part of his own character; accordingly, no ruler

¹ *De Mon.* I. 12: 57. The "perversion" arises when the sovereign individual or body ceases to devote itself to the good of the whole community, and only applies itself to the advantage of a portion (Aristotle, *Politics* III. 7; *Nic. Eth.* VIII. 10).

² *Epist.* VI. 30. *Latin Works of Dante*, p. 317: cf. 320, 321.

can remove greed from his subjects unless he be free from it himself. But, as we have seen already, the Monarch (having nothing more to covet) best fulfils this condition, and therefore a temporal Monarchy is necessary.

Dante further lays down that everything which is good is so in virtue of consisting in unity, and consequently that the human race is best disposed when it is most one, that is, when it is concordant. Now concord depends on unity of wills, which cannot be attained unless there be one will ruling the rest so as to bring them into unity; inasmuch as the wills of mortals, because of the seductive delights of youth, have need of a directive principle; and hence he deduces the necessity for a Monarchy; for that one will cannot exist, unless there be a single prince over all, whose will may be mistress and ruler of all others (*De Mon.* i. 15: 57 ff.). Dante's point that goodness implies unity or oneness is worth dwelling on for a moment. He supports it in characteristic fashion on the one hand by a philosophic argument, and on the other by an appeal to Holy Scripture (*cf. Par.* xxiv. 124-138). The philosophic argument, which is of a highly technical character, need not be stated here. The text of Scripture he alleges is Ps. iv. 8 (A.V. iv. 7), "They have been multiplied by the produce of their corn, wine, and oil." This does not at first sight look very promising; but Dante here seems to be contrasting the righteous David pursuing felicity with a single eye (*cf. S. Paul's* "this one thing I do," &c.), with the wicked and worldly, distracted from attending to the "one thing needful" by their eager chase of a multiplicity of conflicting objects of desire, "corn, wine, and oil." As Mr. Wick-

steed says (*Latin Works of Dante*, p. 170): "In our pursuit of every kind of good, or blessedness, we are distracted by inconsistent aims, losing the unity of our purposes and our own unity, because we do not see the essential unity of all real blessedness and goodness, and therefore seek it in its accidents rather than in its substance; 'goodness,' then, attaches to things in virtue of their essential unity, and 'badness' in virtue of their distracting diversity."

Finally (*De Mon.* i. 16), Dante declares that all his preceding arguments are confirmed by an unique experience, namely that the Incarnation of the Son of God took place under the peaceful rule of Augustus, when, as he says, there was a perfect Monarchy. "That in truth the human race was then blessed in the tranquillity of universal peace is," he says, "witnessed by all the historians and by illustrious poets. To this the 'scribe of the gentleness of Christ' has likewise deigned to bear witness [the reference is probably to Luke ii. 14], and finally Paul has called that most happy state 'the fulness of time.' Verily the time and all temporal things were full, for no ministry to our felicity was then vacant of its minister." He means, that Christ was Pope, and Augustus Emperor.

Dante goes on in the second book of the treatise to prove that the Roman people acquired the functions of monarchy as of right, and by God's appointment; the position being assumed that the Mediæval Empire was the legitimate successor of the Roman Empire, and therefore, equally with it, existing by the appointment of God; and in the third book he proves that the Empire is not dependent on the Papacy but co-ordinate with it; both having been established by God. These

matters lie outside the subject of this chapter, and they will be referred to again in Chap. IV. But near the conclusion of the third book (*De Mon.* III. 16: 43 ff.) occurs a passage of the utmost importance for the understanding of the scheme of the Divine Comedy. "Providence has set two ends before man to be aimed at by him; the blessedness of this life, which consists in the exercise of his proper power and is represented by the Earthly Paradise; and the blessedness of eternal life, which consists in the fruition of the sight of God, to which his proper power cannot ascend unless assisted by the divine light. And this blessedness is given to be understood by the Celestial Paradise. Now to these two ends man must attain by different means, for to the first we attain by the teachings of Philosophy, following them by acting in accordance with the moral and intellectual virtues; to the second, by spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, as we follow them by acting according to the theological virtues, to wit, faith, hope, and charity. Now although these ends and means are made plain to us, the one by human reason (which the philosophers have wholly brought to our knowledge), the other by the Holy Ghost (who hath revealed the truth that is beyond our nature, but yet needful to us, by means of the Prophets and sacred writers, and by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, co-eternal with the Holy Ghost, and by His disciples), yet would human greed cast them behind, were not men (like horses going astray in their brutishness) held in the way by bit and rein. Wherefore man needed a twofold directive power, according to his twofold end, to wit, the Supreme Pontiff to lead the human race, in accordance with the things revealed to eternal life: and

the Emperor to direct the human race to temporal felicity, in accordance with the teachings of Philosophy."

Dante's ideal government of the whole world, whereby man should be guided by the Supreme Pontiff in accordance with the theological virtues to eternal felicity, and by the Emperor in accordance with the moral virtues to temporal felicity, was to him no mere academic speculation, but a most vital and urgent matter. No one can look through his works (the *Vita Nuova* and the earlier lyrics alone excepted) without being struck by the utterly desperate situation that Italy, nay, even the whole world, presented to Dante's eyes. Two of the most striking passages may be mentioned as illustrations: the well-known apostrophe to Italy in the *Purgatorio*, VI. 76-126, and a less well-known passage in the *Convivio* (IV. 6: 168 ff.). And for other countries, see *Paradiso*, XIX. 118 ff. As regards the condition of Florence, Dante's invectives are corroborated by the vivid narrative of Dino Compagni. True it was that no Emperor had ever brought permanent peace and good government to Italy; true it was that only one Emperor, Otho III. (983-1002), who built himself a castle on the Aventine, ever seems to have contemplated a permanent residence in the imperial city.¹ What of that? Greed, violence and disorder were everywhere rampant, and for these there was the one remedy ordained of God, the rule of an Emperor who should be free from greed, and make all the governments of the earth to do righteousness. As Dean Church said in his masterly essay on Dante, "It was a dream in the Middle Ages, in divided and republican Italy, the Italy

¹ Gregorovius, *Storia della città di Roma nel medio evo* (Manzato's Italian translation, III. 548, 578).

of cities, of a real and national government based on justice and law. Dante imagined that the Roman Empire had been one great state, he persuaded himself that Christendom might be such." On the other hand, the theoretical supremacy of the Empire over all other governments, as being the source of the universal Roman law which was the basis of their municipal laws, was a conception familiar to the lawyers of Italy,¹ and Dante was herein only a dreamer so far as he failed to see the impossibility of this supreme law being administered in the existing condition of the world by a single supreme ruler.

¹ *Bulle tino* cited xiv. 110, 111; xv. 250.

CHAPTER IV

THE CENTRAL ALLEGORY OF THE DIVINE COMEDY

At the end of the *Vita Nuova* Dante tells us that a wondrous vision appeared to him which made him determine to utter no more concerning that blessed lady, Beatrice, until he should be capable of treating more worthily of her. "And to attain thereto," he adds, "I am studying to the best of my power, as she knows truly; so that if it shall be the pleasure of Him by whom all things live that my life endure for some years longer, I hope to say of her that which has never been said of any woman." We have here undoubtedly the first germ of the Divine Comedy, but many eventful years were to pass before it developed and bore fruit.

The pursuit of earthly things (*Purg.* xxx. 130), the ardour of philosophic study, participation in public affairs, the harassed life he led during the first troubled years of his exile, his renewed intervention in politics in connection with the descent of the Emperor Henry VII. into Italy, all these things deferred the execution of the glorious purpose that Dante had conceived in his early years. And indeed it was well that it happened so. It is impossible to say what Dante's monument to his Beatrice would have been, had he been free to rear it at an earlier date. But it certainly would not have been anything at all like the Divine

Comedy. Dante has told us in figurative language something of his passage from the chivalrous (Provençal) to the philosophic (Guinicellian) view of love (*Vita Nuova*, §§ 17-19: above, p. 31-37). What would we not give for some similar bit of autobiography that would help us to bridge the chasm which divides the *Canzoni* from the Comedy!

As to the time when the Comedy was written, it is certain that Dante was engaged on it during the closing years of his life, but we have no means to determine when it was begun. As to the dates of the termination of the three *Cantiche* of which it is composed, "The following limitations may be accepted," says Dr. Paget Toynbee:¹ "The *Inferno* must have been completed after 20 April 1314, the date of the death of Pope Clement V., because of the allusion to that event in the 19th Canto (ll. 76-87)²; and not later than 1319, since it is referred to as finished in a Latin poem addressed to Dante in that year by . . . Giovanni del Virgilio, as well as in Dante's poem in reply (see above, p. 24). The *Purgatorio* must have been completed not later than 1319, since it is alluded to as finished in the same poems. The *Paradiso* must have been completed after August 7, 1316, the date of the accession of Pope John XXII., since that Pope is alluded to in the 27th Canto (ll. 58, 59); its latest limit is fixed by the date of Dante's death, September 14, 1321."

As to the name of the poem, Dante himself calls it a Comedy (*Inf.* xvi. 128; xxi. 2), a name which to us

¹ *Dante Alighieri*, p. 198 (4th ed.).

² Parodi, who thinks that the *Inferno* must have been finished earlier, suggests that this passage may have been inserted as an afterthought. (*Bullettino* cited xv. 46, n. 2.)

does not seem very suitable. But it must be remembered that in Dante's time the words "tragedy" and "comedy" had lost their dramatic character, and the distinction between them depended on the dignity of the subject, the character of the issue, and above all, on the language. The following passage from the letter to Can Grande della Scala,¹ in which Dante dedicates the *Paradiso* to him, explains the choice of the title.² "The title of the work is 'Here begins the Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, not by character.' To understand which be it known that *Comedy* is derived from *comus*, 'a village,' and *oda*, which is 'song'; whence comedy is as it were 'rustic song.' So comedy is a certain kind of poetic narration differing from all others. It differs from tragedy in its matter, in that tragedy begins admirably and tranquilly whereas its end or exit is foul and horrible; and it derives its name from *tragus*, which is 'a goat,' and *oda*; as though to say, 'goat-song,' that is, stinking like a goat, as appears from Seneca in his tragedies; whereas comedy introduces some harsh complication, but brings the matter to a prosperous issue, as appears from Terence in his comedies. . . . They likewise differ in their mode of speech, tragedy being exalted and sublime, comedy lax and humble. . . . And hence it is evident that the title of the present work is the Comedy. For if we have regard to its subject-matter, at the beginning it is horrible and stinking, for it is Hell; and in the end

¹ See above, p. 22.

² *Epist. x.*, § 10. *Latin Works of Dante*, p. 349. The authenticity of this letter is still in debate, but the balance of opinion inclines in its favour. The question does not affect the applicability of the passage here quoted.

it is prosperous, desirable, and gracious, for it is Paradise. If we have regard to the mode of speech, the mode is lax and humble, for it is the vernacular speech in which even women discourse." And so Dante speaks of the *Æneid* as Virgil's "lofty tragedy" (*Inf.* xx. 113).

Now what was Dante's object in writing the Comedy? His object was, as stated in the letter to Can Grande (*Epist.* x. § 15), to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity; and also, as Benvenuto da Imola adds,¹ "to secure everlasting glory for himself." Now if there is one thing that emerges more clearly than another in the Comedy it is that Dante was conscious of a divine mission to proclaim God's will and plan of salvation to mankind; and as Dean Church says,² "to stamp a deep impression on men's minds of the eternal issues of good and evil-doing in this life." Thus in the *Inferno* (II.) he likens his revelation of the other world to the visions vouchsafed to S. Paul and to Æneas. (The juxtaposition of these two is characteristic.)

In the *Paradiso* (xxv. 1, 2) he speaks of "the sacred poem to which both heaven and earth had set their hand," "heaven" being God's grace, and "earth" the human talents with which he had been so abundantly endowed; and again in the same Canto (40-45) he speaks of his having been privileged while yet alive on earth to see God, the supreme Emperor (note the title, also given to God in *Inf.* i. 124, and in bitter irony to Lucifer in *Inf.* xxxiv. 28) in His most secret council-chamber, in order that having seen the truth of that

¹ *Comentum super Dantis Comœdiam* (Florence, 1887), vol. i. p. 17.

² *Essay on Dante*, p. 97 (ed. 1878).

Imperial Court, he may strengthen in himself, and in others "the Hope which on earth enamours men of good." And again in the *Paradiso* (xvii, 115 ff.), when Dante consults his ancestor, Cacciaguida, as to whether he shall reveal all that he has seen in the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, fearing on the one hand, that if he tells it, it will be of pungent savour to many, and that if he keeps it back "I fear to lose life among those that shall call this time ancient"; Cacciaguida bids him "put aside all falsehood, disclose all thy vision—and let men scratch where they itch." A similar claim to be heard as a teacher set apart from the common run of men, and entitled to speak with authority, is made by Dante in the first chapter of the *Convivio*, of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, and of the *De Monarchia*.

And now what is the message that Dante has to deliver? Let us in the first place bear in mind the passage in the *De Monarchia* (III. 16, 43 ff.) to which reference has already been made (above, p. 57), where the two goals or ends of man are pointed out, namely, the blessedness of this life, represented by the Earthly Paradise, to which man may attain by following the teachings of Philosophy and acting according to the moral virtues, and the blessedness of eternal life figured by the Celestial Paradise, which blessedness consists in the fruition of the vision of God to be attained by following the teachings of Revelation, and acting according to the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. In the Comedy, then, Dante sets forth how men through repentance and purification may be set in the right way to attain these ends; and he does so by giving a *fictional* description of the *actual* states of the human soul when separated from the body, which

fictitious description at the same time represents the *actual* states of the human soul when in the body. The state of the soul whether in the body or out of the body is threefold; for in one case the soul is lying in sins, and whilst living with the body is *morally* dead, and thus is in the *moral* Hell, and when it has been separated from the body it is in the *essential* Hell if it dies in incurable obstinacy. In the second case the soul is withdrawing itself from vices, and whilst in the body is in the *moral* Purgatory, that is, in the act of penitence wherein it is purging its sins; but when separated from the body it is in the *essential* Purgatory. In the third case the soul is in the perfect habit of virtue; it has attained, so far as is possible in the body, to the life of speculation, and is in some sort in Paradise, because in the highest state of felicity possible to man in this life; and when separated from the body after death it is in the *essential* or Heavenly Paradise, where it enjoys the vision of God in Whom is true and perfect felicity.¹ This scheme of Dante's, to describe the *actual* states of the soul on earth (*i.e.* the moral Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise) by means of a *fictitious* representation of the *actual* states of the soul after death (*i.e.* the *essential* Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise) must never be lost sight of. These two strands in the allegory are very closely intertwined, and in order that the poem may be thoroughly understood and enjoyed, neither must be lost sight of. If, as Mr. Wicksteed admirably says, "the Comedy is taken simply as a record of things seen in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, its purpose will be missed."

The third strand in the allegory is the person of Dante himself. Sometimes he signifies the ideal Chris-

¹ *Benvenuto da Imola*, i. 16.

tian rescuing himself from the shipwreck that sin has made of his life, and toiling in God's appointed way to the two goals of temporal and eternal felicity ; sometimes he is the actual Dante, the Florentine of the fourteenth century, the man who in his own person has been through the experience he is describing ; more often the two significations are closely, and sometimes almost inextricably blended. This is especially the case in the discourses between Dante and Beatrice in Paradise ; on the other hand, in the famous scene of the reproaches of Beatrice in the *Purgatorio* (xxx., xxxi.), and in Dante's last vision of her in the *Paradiso* (xxxi. 67 ff.) it is Dante the individual man, not Dante the symbol, with whom we have to do. Sometimes, again, the individual Dante appears a sinner like any other of the spirits in purgation, as for instance when he tells us that he himself dreads in anticipation the terrible punishment that pride must undergo in the essential Purgatory (*Purg.* xiii. 136) ; and at other times, as in the passages already quoted regarding his consciousness of a divine commission, he appears as the recipient of God's special grace and as the consecrated herald of His will to man. But in one way or another Dante's personality dominates the poem, and is the real and abiding cause of its fascination. He is, as has been well said, the true protagonist of the poem, the centre on which all the interest turns, and he never allows himself to be forgotten. We are made to share in his joys, his sorrows, and his hardships, his opinions in literature, science, and religion ; above all in his love and devotion to his two chief guides, Virgil and Beatrice.

Having thus described in general Dante's aim in the Comedy and the method by which he attains it, let us

now try to get a more particular idea of the working out of his scheme. And in order to do so we shall have first of all to consider the 1st Canto of the *Inferno*, which is in the nature of an introduction to the whole poem. Dante, then, in the midway of his life, that is to say at the age of thirty-five, in the year 1300, *finds himself again* (note the expression) in a dark and trackless wood. His "finding himself again" shows that he has got to the point reached by the prodigal son when he said, "I will arise and go to my father," *i.e.* he found that he had altogether missed the true object of life. The wild and trackless wood represents the world as it was in 1300. Why was it wild and trackless? Because the guides appointed to lead men to temporal felicity in accordance with the teachings of Philosophy, and to eternal felicity in accordance with the teachings of Revelation, that is to say, the Emperor and the Pope, were false to their trust. Albert of Austria, intent on his ambitious schemes in Germany, never came into Italy to be crowned as Emperor, and Boniface VIII., claiming to be lord of all the world, given up to simony and the heaping up of money, proclaiming a crusade against Christians, even against two cardinals, was no true Pope; and S. Peter in Paradise, nay, all heaven itself, blushed for shame as the first Pope proclaimed his successor's infamy and declared him a usurper of his place (*Par.* xxvii. 10-36). And so, resolved if it may be, to escape from the terrible wood, Dante looks up and beholds a hill lit up by the rising sun. The hill signifies the life of virtue; the sun which illumines it is of course the Sun of Righteousness. The hill, in fact, seems to be a symbol of the Earthly Paradise which

he is eventually to reach. Dante would fain ascend it, and indeed attempts to do so, but is scared away by three formidable wild beasts, a leopard, a lion, and a wolf, each more terrible than the other, who appear in succession and bar his way; and the wolf is already beginning to drive him down again. These beasts are vices which in the absence of the strong restraining hand of a righteous Emperor could rage at will against defenceless man. The leopard probably represents lust, though in the opinion of some, it stands for envy; the lion represents pride, and the wolf, greed. The last is regarded by Dante as by far the most dangerous; and when we consider the nature of the vice, and the many passages in his works in which it is set forth as the main obstacle to human well-being, we can easily see why he here emphasises the terrible power of the wolf, which he says has "ere now made many peoples live in misery" (*Inf.* i. 50). When, as in 1300, the time assigned to Dante's journey through the realms of the dead, both Pope and Emperor were wholly under the sway of greed, what wonder is it if he felt that mankind were indeed in desperate case, and that the life of peace and justice typified by the sunlit hill was unattainable? Whence was deliverance to arise? As Dante was being driven back by the wolf, the shade of the great poet Virgil appears to him, and when Dante appeals to him for help against the beast, Virgil tells him that the way up the hill of peace and justice is barred by the wolf of greed until the greyhound (*Veltro*), which symbolises some future righteous Emperor, shall come and drive the wolf back into Hell. Mean-time Dante must find escape by going another way (*Inf.* i. 91); the meaning of which is that since the

divinely appointed guides of humanity to the goals of felicity are enslaved by greed, and therefore incapable of exercising their functions, man must work out his salvation as best he may without them ; he must, in fact, go by " the way of subjective experience," as Mr. Wicksteed says. Virgil accordingly offers to guide Dante through Hell and Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise (the blessedness of this life), and Beatrice will then lead him on through the Celestial Paradise (the blessedness of eternal life) even up to the vision of God. Hence it is pretty clear what Virgil and Beatrice respectively stand for ; Virgil for the teachings of Philosophy, which *should* be the guiding principle of the Emperor, but which, since the imperial direction cannot be had, Dante must follow in the way of subjective experience ; Beatrice, for the teachings of Revelation or divine enlightenment, which *should* be the guiding principle of the Pope, but which, since the Pope has abdicated his teaching office, Dante must in like manner follow in the way of subjective experience, finding (again in Mr. Wicksteed's words) " by direct recourse to Human and Divine enlightenment, *i.e.* Philosophy and Revelation, an escape from the evils of bad government." But there is another sense in which " the other way " by which Dante is to journey toward felicity is to be understood. As Benvenuto observes (I. 53), Virgil, in bidding Dante follow his guidance through Hell, intimates that it is not yet time for him to go up the hill of peace and justice, because men cannot happily pass from one extreme to the other ; for one cannot at once turn into a saint from having been a sinner ; but it is necessary to proceed little by little, and first to go down to Hell, *i.e.* to the knowledge of vice, because

the knowledge of what sin is, is the beginning of repentance ; and evil, unless it be known, cannot be avoided.

And now let us consider why it is that Virgil is chosen as the symbol of Philosophy, which is to guide man to temporal felicity. At first one might think that Aristotle, whose teaching Dante followed as closely as it was given him to do, and whom he calls " the Master of those that know," would have been a better choice. But Virgil is preferred before him because of Virgil's connection with the Roman Empire, which as has been said so often, was the keystone of Dante's politico-moral system. The function of the Empire was the guiding of man to felicity through the teachings of Philosophy. The *Æneid* is the apotheosis of the Roman Empire, of whose prerogatives the Mediæval Empire was in Dante's opinion the lawful heir. Who, then, more fitting than Virgil to signify the philosophy which should be the directing principle of the Empire? Moreover, Virgil was a poet, and more than that, the poet to whom, above all others, his predecessors, Dante confessed himself indebted (*Inf.* i. 82). The sixth book of the *Æneid* in particular, wherein the descent of Æneas under the Sibyl's guidance to the infernal regions is described, furnished Dante with a good many suggestions which he developed in the Comedy. Furthermore, there is reason to think that it was his study of the *Æneid* which suggested to Dante the interpretation of the story of the Roman people which he develops in the *De Monarchia*; that is to say, which persuaded him that the Roman people obtained the dominion of the world by God's appointment, and therefore that the Empire rested on a divine title.¹

¹ See *De Mon.* ii. 1, with note on p. 175.

The choice of Beatrice for the symbol of divine enlightenment, or if we will, as the symbol of Theology or Divine Wisdom, is, of course, the fulfilment of Dante's early promise "to say of her what had never been said of any woman."

Virgil then is to be Dante's guide in the journey through Hell and Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise, the goal of temporal felicity. But since, although man must work out his own salvation, he cannot do it by the guidance of Philosophy alone, without God's grace, Virgil explains to Dante, who is at first extremely reluctant to enter upon the arduous journey, and indeed well-nigh abandons it altogether (*Inf.* II. 10-42), that he, Virgil, is the emissary of Beatrice, the lady of his early love, the symbol of Divine Wisdom, who, moved by love, has descended into Hell to entreat him, Virgil, to rescue Dante. And the intervention of Beatrice has been procured by the grace of God, symbolised by S. Lucy, which has been granted through the Blessed Virgin (*Inf.* II. 94-99); whom Dante ever invoked morning and evening, as he tells us himself (*Par.* XXIII. 88, 89). Here, then, we see the fusion of Dante's teaching as a Moralist with his teaching as a Divine. The practice of the moral virtues under the teaching of Philosophy leads man to temporal felicity, but God's grace is needed in order that the goal may be attained. Virgil (Philosophy) must act as the emissary of Beatrice (Theology) and under her direction. This is wholly in accord with what we read at the end of the *De Monarchia* (III. 16: 130) where Dante, after proving that the Emperor does not derive his authority mediately from the Pope but immediately from God, qualifies his position by saying that it does

not follow from thence that the Roman Prince is subordinate in nothing to the Roman Pontiff, inasmuch as mortal felicity (to which the Emperor is to guide us) is in a certain sense ordained with reference to immortal felicity (to which the Pope is to guide us). "Let Cæsar therefore," says Dante, "observe that reverence to Peter which a first-born son should observe to a father, so that, illuminated by the light of paternal grace, he may with greater power irradiate the world over which he is set by Him alone who is ruler of all things spiritual and temporal." It must never be forgotten that though Dante inveighs with unsparing severity against the wickedness and worldliness of individual Popes, he never for a moment fails to recognise the sacredness of the Papal Office, ordained by God to exercise spiritual jurisdiction over all the world, and to guide mankind to the goal of eternal felicity.

As regards the extreme reluctance felt by Dante to enter on his arduous journey (*Inf.* II. 10-42), for which he is sharply rebuked by Virgil, it probably represents the moral shrinking from the hard way of repentance that besets the sinner who is purposing to lead a new life; and also the intellectual shrinking which Dante may well have experienced from the unparalleled difficulties to be surmounted in the literary task he had set himself to perform. The representation of his reluctance to set out with Virgil also serves to emphasise the idea Dante means to convey that (as was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter), in writing the Comedy, he was delivering a message from God to men.

And now at last Dante sets out on his survey of the other world. His literal cosmography is so exactly

planned, down to the smallest details, and his description of his experiences gives such a profound impression that they actually occurred, as to make it difficult to remember that the representation of the essential Hell and Purgatory is, as has already been said, a *fictitious representation*. That is to say, we are not to suppose (for instance) that Dante really believed that the Mountain of Purgatory was an actual mountain rising out of the southern ocean and forming the antipodes of Jerusalem, or that it was built up out of the matter displaced when Satan was hurled through the earth and became fixed in the centre of it, as is described in *Inferno* xxxiv. 121-126, or that there is a hollow cavity which was formed by the rising up of the Mountain of Purgatory and gives a connection between Hell and Purgatory. This is all a mere fiction necessary in order to enable the poet to represent with verisimilitude the allegorical cosmography according to which Satan or Lucifer should be at the farthest possible point from the abode of God, and Purgatory, the spiritual antithesis of Hell (as we shall see presently), in the direct line from the abode of Satan to the abode of God; and to enable Dante in his journey to pass from Hell to Purgatory without retracing his steps. On the other hand, Dante probably did believe that Hell was under the earth, for, as S. Thomas says,¹ though its position has not been revealed to us, it is most agreeable to what we read in Scripture to believe that it is under the earth. With regard to the location of Purgatory Dante might very well consider that he had, to some extent at least, a free hand, since he was not hampered by any text of

¹ *Summa Theol. Suppl.* 97, 7.

Holy Scripture, and S. Thomas¹ only gives it as "a probable opinion most consonant to the utterances of the Saints" that Purgatory is adjacent to Hell, and that the flames which torture the damned purify the righteous.

Dante's greatest deviation from the current belief is his placing the Earthly Paradise at the summit of the Mountain of Purgatory. The reason for this is very obvious, his intention being to show that man must be restored by purification to his original innocence before he can ascend to God, and that the attaining of earthly felicity, typified by the Earthly Paradise, must precede the attainment of heavenly felicity typified by the Celestial Paradise. The reason why he thus places the Earthly Paradise at the summit of the Mountain of Purgatory is very well expressed by Benvenuto at the beginning of his comment on *Purg.* xxviii.: "By this garden (*i.e.* the garden of Eden) so verdant and delightful our Poet sets before us figuratively the happy condition of man when he is in the most perfect state of virtue that it is possible for him to reach in this life of misery; and therefore he has rightly represented this place in the highest situation of any on earth, near to Heaven, far removed from all atmospheric disturbances, exempt from everything troublesome, full of every delight." The question as to what was the actual nature and position of the Earthly Paradise, and even as to whether it had any corporal existence at all, was eagerly debated throughout the Middle Ages. S. Thomas' opinion was that it did exist somewhere in the East, but was rendered entirely inaccessible by mountains, seas, or some hot region that might not be

¹ *Ib.* Appendix *De Purgatorio*, Art. 2.

passed through (*Summa Theol.* i. 102, 1). Dante therefore would not find any authority to forbid his placing the Earthly Paradise pretty much where he chose.

Let us now proceed to our examination of the three states of the soul pourtrayed in the Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise of Dante; that is to say, the soul in sin, the soul in purgation, and the soul in righteousness. And first let us mark Dante's conception of the nature of sin. Sin is slavery: "He is seeking freedom," says Virgil to Cato (*Purg.* i. 71), speaking of Dante, at the foot of the Mountain of Purgatory. "Thou hast brought me from slavery to freedom," says Dante to Beatrice in his last address to her in Paradise (*Par.* xxxi. 85). "Thy will is now free, upright and whole," says Virgil to Dante as he brings him into the Earthly Paradise (*Purg.* xxvii. 140). Sin, in Dante's idea, is the result of the judgment being anticipated by appetite (see above, p. 52), for which anticipation we are responsible; since although, as he says (*Purg.* xvi. 73) "the influence of the heavens (or as *we* should say, our hereditary tendencies and our environment) may set our impulses in motion, a light is given us to know good and evil, and free-will (*i.e.* our power of free choice guided by reason), if it endure strain in its first battlings with the heavens, at length gains the whole victory." And if it does not, the will becomes enslaved and entirely fixed on earthly things, and unless the man have repented previously, after death his will cannot be turned to God, but is immovably fixed on evil; for, as Dante says (*Par.* xx. 106, 107), no one ever returns in Hell to a right will; and therefore Dante's Hell is the representation of the state of impenitence. This state is inflexibly reproduced by Dante in his descrip-

tions of the lost souls ; and in no case more remarkably than in that of Guido of Montefeltro (*Inf.* XXVII. 64-132). Guido is ashamed of his infamy, he tells Dante that he is only moved to disclose it by the fact that no one ever returns alive from that deep, *he describes his own true repentance on earth*, he inveighs against Pope Boniface who lured him to relapse into sin, he makes a true confession of his guilt, he gives utterance to the anguish of remorse ; he does everything but express any wish for reconciliation with an offended God. He died impenitent and remains so irrevocably.

The dominant idea of impenitence is remarkably impressed upon us by the *tone of the conversations* which the lost spirits have with Dante as he passes through Hell. They all speak in character, and this gives endless variety to the poem ; but not one of them shows any sign of repentance. They are after death in exactly the same state of mind as when living on earth. Look at one of the most famous of these spirits, the haughty Ghibelline Farinata standing erect in the fiery tomb which is assigned to him as a heretic of the sect of Epicurus, who, as Dante says, “ affirm that the soul dies with the body ” (*Inf.* x. 22 ff.). Farinata gazes contemptuously at Dante for a moment and then says, “ Who were thine ancestors ? ” and when Dante tells him that they were Guelfs, the other raises his eyebrows and says that they were the adversaries of his own ancestors, “ wherefore I twice scattered them.” And then, after the pathetic interruption caused by Cavalcante Cavalcanti, who rises up in the tomb and anxiously asks why his son Guido is not with Dante, Farinata, unheeding, resumes his talk with Dante, and after predicting to him his exile, asks him why the

Florentines continue so implacable against his family, entreating Dante to answer by his hope of *returning to the sweet world*. Mark the subtlety of this touch. Farinata, his will enslaved by sin and incapable of repentance, can conceive of nothing more to be longed for than a return to the world which is sweet to him, but to those who have tasted of the joys of Paradise, wears such a "vile semblance" (see *Par.* xxii. 133-135).

Take another famous episode—that of Ulysses (*Inf.* xxvi. 55-142), who is punished among the deceitful counsellors together with Diomed for various treacherous schemes connected with the Trojan War. Ulysses describes to Dante his last voyage, how he fared forth with his companions beyond the Pillars of Hercules to explore the unknown regions of the world, and was wrecked in a storm when he was come within sight of the Mountain of Purgatory. His soul even amid the torment of the burning flame that envelops him and his associate, Diomed, is still intent on his adventures in the world of the living; and the only grief he expresses is at the frustration of his discovery of a new land.

The doctrine of the impossibility of repentance in Hell implies the consequential doctrine of the perpetual duration of punishment. The will has become wholly enslaved, and the sinful state having become perpetual, the punishment must be perpetual also; sin cannot cease in Hell, and therefore punishment cannot cease; nay, the sinful state of the soul is its punishment, and since it cannot be altered, the punishment can never cease. The truth that sin is its own punishment is in general carefully attended to by Dante in the fictitious torments he assigns to the souls in Hell; they are calculated to set forth the nature of the sin or its conse-

quences. One of the best examples is the punishment assigned to hypocrites (*Inf.* xxiii. 58). "Down there," says Dante, *i.e.* in the fifth gulf of the eighth circle of Hell, "we found a painted people, with deep hoods before their eyes, made in the shape that they make for the monks of Cologne. Outwardly they are gilded so as to be dazzling, but within are all lead ; and so heavy, that Frederick's, compared to them, were of straw. O weary mantle for eternity !" (the allusion is to the punishment inflicted on traitors by the Emperor Frederick II. ; he had them wrapped in cloaks of lead, which were then melted over a fire). So also we may remark the punishment of the traitors, who are fixed in the frozen waters of Cocytus (*Inf.* xxxii. 1-xxxiv. 15) to intimate that such deliberate acts of treacherous murder and slaughter as they had perpetrated could only proceed from men in whom every spark of the fire of love had been utterly quenched.

It has been pointed out by a distinguished writer that the sympathy which Milton felt and makes his readers feel for his Satan has somewhat dislocated the centre of interest in *Paradise Lost*.¹ Nothing of the kind can be said of the treatment by Dante of his Lucifer. To the Trinity of supreme Power, Love, and Wisdom, Dante opposes a monstrous figure whose three faces represent supreme Impotence, Hatred, and Ignorance. Lucifer having lost "the good of the intellect" (*Inf.* iii. 18) and become without understanding, his free-will is so completely gone that he seems reduced to a mere automaton. Fixed in the centre of the earth, he is capable of two motions only ; with his three pairs of jaws he is perpetually crushing and tearing the

¹ W Raleigh, Milton, p. 94.

supreme traitors, Judas the betrayer of Christ the first Pope, and Brutus and Cassius the betrayers of Julius Cæsar the first Emperor; and by the flapping of his three pairs of wings he sends forth the blasts of hatred which freeze the waters of Cocytus. So utterly has Lucifer's angelic semblance vanished that Dante, on first catching sight, through the murk, of his huge bulk and flapping wings, actually mistakes him for a windmill (*Inf.* xxxiv. 6, 7). Such is Dante's representation of the "Emperor of the realm of woe" (*Inf.* xxxiv. 28); such is the miserable being, pouring down tears from his six eyes, and bloody slobber from his three mouths, in whom Dante recognises "the creature who was once so fair" (*Inf.* xxxiv. 18), and who now, by a rather ludicrous expedient, is made to serve as the means of transit for Dante himself and his guide from the northern to the southern hemisphere, from Hell to Purgatory. "Sin," as Mr. Wicksteed has said, "is in its nature unspiritual, and therefore has a tendency to surround itself with a material atmosphere." This truth has never been more powerfully illustrated than by Dante's portrait of Lucifer.

We now turn to Purgatory, wherein Dante sets forth the state of the soul in purgation or penitence; that is to say, forsaking its sinful courses and learning to conform its will to the Will of God; and he sets it forth by a fictitious description of the essential Purgatory, *i.e.* the state of the soul after death of them who have died in grace but whose penitence has not been completed on earth. The following passage is abridged from the "Note on Dante's Purgatory" in the Temple Classics *Purgatorio*, p. 432: "Now the key to the comprehension of Dante's representation of Purga-

tory is to be found in the connection of the Mountain with the Earthly Paradise, or Garden of Eden. According to Dante's fiction already glanced at (above, p. 73) the Mountain of Purgatory was thrown up when Satan was hurled down from Heaven to the centre of the earth. So Satan's fall was the cause for a portion of the earth's bulk to leap up heavenward, thus making itself worthy to become the seat of that human race which was to replace the fallen angels. Now the life of Eden, had man persevered in it, was to have been an earthly life, with all the joy springing from conformity of man's will with the Will of God; and higher revelations, which would complete man's life, not as an earthly but as a heavenly being, were to have been added afterwards; and therefore, when man fell, he forfeited immediately the perfect earthly life, and ultimately the perfect heavenly life. His first task then must be to recover the life of the Earthly Paradise; and as purgation, or recovery from the fall, consists primarily in regaining Eden, the mountain pedestal of the Garden of Eden becomes by a necessity of symbolic logic the scene of purgation." It has already been explained why Virgil is chosen as Dante's guide through Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise (above, p. 70), and, since the object of the purgatorial discipline is to restore to the penitent the freedom of his will which has been enslaved by sin,¹ Cato of Utica, who is (in Dante's view) the supreme example of the attainment of such freedom, is appropriately assigned as the permanent guardian of Purgatory in general; though it is contended with some force by d'Ovidio² that Cato

¹ See above, p. 75.

² *Il Purgatorio e il suo preludio*, 92-95.

is guardian of the Ante-purgatory only. In any case, however, it is poetically fitting, as the same writer observes,¹ that the martyr to freedom should be the first guardian met by Dante on his arrival on the shore of Purgatory, where the soul's freedom, lost through sin, is recovered through penitence.

The condition of the soul in Purgatory is the exact contrary of that of the soul in Hell; it is turned to God instead of being turned away from Him; it longs above all else that its will may by degrees be conformed to God's Will, and is eager to undergo any pain, so that this goal may be attained. The chief aim of the purgatorial discipline therefore is to correct that misdirected love of the soul "which makes the crooked way seem straight" (*Purg.* x. 2, 3); for, according to Dante's doctrine (*Purg.* xvii. 85 ff.) all the seven capital vices, *i.e.* the roots from which spring all sins that are committed, are produced either by a perversion of love, as in Pride, Envy, and Anger, where we love what we ought to hate, *viz.*, our neighbour's harm; or by a defective love of what we ought to love, as in Sloth, where we are slack in the love and service of God; or by excessive love of earthly things, as in Greed, Gluttony, and Lust.

The secondary aim of the purgatorial discipline is to enforce the payment of the temporal penalty incurred to the justice of God by sin, the eternal penalty having already been remitted by the mercy of God in Christ. The following passage from S. Thomas (*Summa Theol.* i. 2^{ae}. 87, 6) will make this doctrine quite clear. "There are in sin two things that we may consider, *viz.*, the guilty act and the defilement that ensues. Now it is clear that in all actual sins when the act of sin is over

¹ *Op. cit.* 122.

a liability remains, for the act of sin makes a man liable to punishment inasmuch as he transgresses the order of Divine justice, to the which order he returns not except by means of compensating punishment . . . so that one who has indulged his will more than he ought, by acting against God's command, should, after the order of Divine Justice, either of his own accord or on compulsion, suffer something in opposition to that which he would wish. . . . But with respect to the removal of the defilement of sin . . . this cannot be taken away from a man unless the man's will accept the order of Divine Justice, either by punishing himself of his own accord, or patiently bearing the punishment inflicted by God; and in either case the punishment is in the nature of satisfaction." That is to say, the purgatorial punishments benefit the sinner by extinguishing his liability, and are not vindictive only, like the punishments of Hell.¹

In accordance with this doctrine, the purgation of the souls in Dante's *Purgatorio* is carried out on the following scheme. On each of the seven terraces or cornices of the Mount of Purgation is purged one of the seven capital vices in the order given above (p. 81). On each terrace the souls have in the first place to undergo an exercising of the mind and will, which exercising consists (*a*) in meditating on examples (which are put before them in different ways) of the virtue contrary to the vice that is being purged away, and examples of the vice (the examples are invariably chosen from Holy Scripture and from the "Scriptures of the Pagans");

¹ Hence in the *Purgatorio* we find torments which, though intensely painful, are never disgusting as some of those in the *Inferno* are.

(b) in offering up a suitable prayer. Note by the way that the slothful spirits on the fourth terrace, by a significant exception, offer no prayer, being deprived of a privilege they neglected on earth. In the second place the souls in purgation have to undergo a physical punishment by way of penal satisfaction for their transgression of the "Order of Divine Justice." Thus, for example, on the first and lowest terrace is purged the capital vice of Pride. The examples for meditation are set forth in sculptures carved on the floor of the terrace and on the side of the mountain. The spirits say the Lord's Prayer, and they crawl along bearing enormous blocks of stone. They who had exalted themselves on earth are now bowed down, but their only lament is, that they are not strong enough to bear even heavier loads, and bend even lower in humility. For, although the spirits long with a supreme longing for the vision of God to which they are sometime to attain, they long in the first place to fit themselves for it by undergoing the appointed discipline. As on earth their will was set on sin, so now it is set on the discipline which works their deliverance. Then, when a soul is conscious that it is entirely free, without any barrier between it and the vision of God, in short, that its will conforms instinctively to God's Will, it quits its purgation,¹ and after a brief sojourn in the Earthly Paradise, where it drinks of the stream of Lethe, which removes the memory of all past evil, and the stream of Eunoë, which renews the soul even as "new plants renewed with new leaves" (*Purg.* XXXIII. 143), it rises up into the Celestial Paradise. The combined effect of the draughts

¹ See *Purg.* XXI. 61-63.

of Lethe and Eunoë is not that the past sins are forgotten as facts, but that they are forgotten as sins ; all that is remembered in Heaven concerning them is the over-ruling Providence which brought good out of evil. "Here," says Folco of Marseilles in Paradise, after referring to his evil life on earth, "here we repent not, but we smile, not at the guilt, which cometh not to mind, but at that Goodness which ordered and provided." (*Par.* ix. 103.)

As by the story of Guido of Montefeltro (*Inf.* xxvii. 67 ff.) Dante taught that absolution, even if bestowed by the Pope, will not save an impenitent sinner from Hell ; so (in his view) neither can a papal excommunication exclude a repentant soul from Purgatory, even if the repentance be delayed till the last moment of life, as he represents in his famous narrative (*Purg.* iii. 112 ff.) of the death of Manfred (son of the Emperor Frederick II.). But yet the sentence of excommunication is not without effect, for it prevents the repentant soul from entering at once on its purgation, and it has to remain in the Ante-purgatory for a period thirty times as long as it was contumacious on earth (*Purg.* iii. 136). Similarly, those who have delayed to repent until their last moments, are detained in the Ante-purgatory for as long a period as they remained impenitent on earth (*Purg.* iv. 130). This follows quite logically from the doctrine of the Church that repentance is impossible after death, but possible the moment before ; if it be delayed till then, the delay is itself a sin calling for punishment, though the repentance be real ; and no punishment can be heavier than that of keeping the penitent soul from the discipline that fits it for Heaven. This punishment may be removed by the offering of

faithful prayer on earth for the penitent soul ; and in like manner the purgatorial discipline may be abridged by the same means (see especially the case of Dante's friend, Forese Donati, in *Purg.* xxiii. 85-90) ; hence the frequent requests by the repentant spirits that Dante on his return to earth would pray for them and get their relatives to pray for them too. As has been pointed out by Dr. Moore (*Studies in Dante*, Ser. II. 50-55) the object of prayer by men on earth for the spirits in Purgatory is, in Dante's view, not to exempt them from the discipline of purgation, but to accelerate its action and thereby to help them "to wash away the stains they have borne hence" (*Purg.* xi. 34-36). The possibility of the remission or abbreviation of the purgatorial discipline by Indulgence is not noticed by Dante. This need cause no surprise, for the applicability of Indulgences to the dead, though held by S. Thomas (*Summa Theol. Suppl.* 25, art. 1) was as yet in debate, and the validity of such indulgences was not established till long after Dante's time.¹ This was perhaps fortunate for him, for he would have found these Indulgences difficult to fit into his purgatorial system (*cf.* Moore *ubi supra*).

The subject of the *Paradiso* is the state of the soul that has attained to eternal felicity, and the interest of this *Cantica* to us lies for the most part in Dante's conception of the "essential" Paradise, the actual state of the soul that has been admitted to the vision of God. As Mr. Wicksteed says, the keynotes of the *Paradiso* are Eternity and Fruition. What does Dante understand by Eternity ? Eternity is not interminable

¹ See H. C. Lea, *History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences*, III. 336 ff.

time. It is not time at all.¹ As Buti says,² "Every operation of God which seems new to us, is always present to God." In Time, you cannot get away from the idea of change, of succession, of before and after. Eternity is *all at once*. According to the definition of it given by Boëthius,³ and adopted by S. Thomas,⁴ Eternity is the possession, *all at once*, and perfect, of endless life. As Mr. Wicksteed says,⁵ "To the mediæval thinker Eternity is not endless time but a state in which perfection is found in the *co-existence*, not in the *succession* of the parts that make the whole. Time, in its thin succession, drops one thing to grasp another, and ever conscious of the incompleteness of present experience reaches ever on and on, and so 'imitates by *going* that fulness of life which it cannot grasp by *abiding*.' When Augustine speaks of God's eternal 'now,' to which all *our* past and future are present, when Dante speaks of God as 'Him in Whom every *where* and every *when* are focussed in a point' (*Par.* xxix. 12); that is, to whom every season is *now*, and every point is *here*, they are not using mere vague phrases, but struggling to express their sense of the inevitable limitations which the conceptions of time and place set upon human thought, and the belief that the absolute life of God transcends such limitations." Or as F. W. Robertson says (*Sermons*, Ser. I. 247), "Life Eternal means, not duration of existence but heavenly quality of existence."

¹ See *Par.* xxix. 16-21, where Dante, anticipating the question "What was God doing before He created the universe?" states in effect that the terms "before" and "after" are meaningless in reference to God.

² *Commento sopra la Divina Comedia*, III. 764.

³ *Cons. Phil.* V. pr. 6.

⁴ *Summa Theol.*, I. 10, 1.

⁵ Wicksteed and Carpenter: *Studies in Theology*, p. 10. (Dent, 1903.)

The following quotation from a letter by F. D. Maurice seems exactly to express Dante's conception of Eternity.¹ He begins by referring to our Lord's words, "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent," and goes on: "At first we shrink from the strict meaning of these words. We suppose that they do *not* mean that eternal life is the knowledge of God, but only that those who obtain that knowledge or that life will retain it through eternity. But when I ask myself, 'Do I then know what *eternity* is? Do I mean by eternity a certain very very long time?' I am shocked at once by my want of faith and want of reason. Our Lord has been training us by His beautiful blessed teaching to see eternity as something *altogether out of time*, to connect it with Him 'who was, and is, and is to come.' He has been teaching me that I have a spirit which cannot rest in time, which must strive after the living, the permanent, the eternal, after God Himself." And this is what the souls in Dante's Paradise have attained to, and what he, so far as it is possible, makes us realise that they have attained to.

A very practical demonstration that he has emerged into a new mode of existence wherein time is abolished is afforded to Dante, when, in the course of his passage through the heavens, he reaches the eighth heaven, that of the Fixed Stars. Here Beatrice bids him look down and see *beneath his feet* (*Par.* xxii. 129), in the far distance, all the planetary heavens, with the sun and the other planets revolving in their courses round the earth. He may now indeed realise that he has got out of time, when the instruments by which time can be computed are left behind.

¹ *Life of F. D. Maurice*, by F. Maurice, II. 17. (Macmillan, 1884.)

A similar demonstration that the life of Heaven has as little to do with *place* as with time is given when Beatrice, in the most emphatic language she can command, declares to Dante (*Par.* iv. 28-39) that the abode of the blessed spirits is not in the material heavens wherein, by special grace and as a concession to his human infirmity, they appear to him in order thus to indicate the degree of their bliss, but in the Empyrean which is beyond the limits of space : that Heaven

“that is unbodied light
Light intellectual, replete with love,
Love of true happiness replete with joy ;
Joy that transcends all sweetness of delight.”¹

“There,” says S. Benedict to Dante, “each desire is perfect, ripe, and whole ; in it alone every part is where it ever was, for it is not in space ” (*Par.* xxii. 64-66).

In that most beautiful third canto of the *Paradiso* Dante learns from the lips of Piccarda (sister of Corso Donati and of Dante’s friend, Forese Donati) something of the nature of the happiness of Heaven. She appears to him in the lunar heaven, the lowest and nearest to earth of all the heavens, and Dante, by a not unnatural misconception of her words, supposing her to be stationed there (*Par.* iii. 64), asks whether she and her companion spirits do not desire some higher place ?

“Brother (she replies), our will
Is, in composure, settled by the power
Of charity, who makes us will alone
What we possess, and nought beyond desire :
If we should wish to be exalted more
Then must our wish jar with the high will
Of him who sets us here ; which in these orbs

¹ *Par.* xxx. 39-42 (Cary’s translation).

Thou wilt confess not possible, if here
 To be in charity must needs befall ;
 And, if her nature well thou contemplate,
 Rather is it inherent in this state
 Of blessedness, to keep ourselves within
 The divine will, by which our wills with his
 Are one. So that as we, from step to step,
 Are placed throughout this kingdom, pleases all,
 Even as our king, who in us plants his will ;
 And in his will is our tranquillity.”¹

The passage just quoted may serve to illustrate the nature of Fruition, the other keynote of the *Paradiso*, which is thus explained by Mr. Wicksteed in the remarkable essay quoted above (p. 86). “Connected with the conception of Eternity [already set forth] is the kindred conception of Fruition ; that is to say, the belief that truth is not only worth the winning, but worth the having ; the belief that the bliss of communion with God is not something in the encouragement and refreshment of which we can go along with our active life, but *is the absolute goal in which the active life finds its meaning and in which at last it shall be swallowed up*. In Dante’s belief, to see God is to see as God sees ; and just in so far as we rise into true communion with Him and do in truth see God, so far shall we see things not in their fragmentary imperfection, but in their combined perfectness.” This, then, is Dante’s conception of Heaven, the fruition of God, the state of felicity in which we enjoy that which we have desired for its own sake, and not as a step toward some other goal, namely, the perfect conformity of our will with the Will of God, and following thereon. the understanding, so far as is possible for created beings, of all mysteries and all knowledge in the light of the vision of God,

¹ *Par.* III. 70–85 (Cary’s translation).

the satisfying of every desire, of every need of our nature, the completion of what is incomplete on earth ; for then, as Browning says, " All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good shall exist, not in its semblance, but itself." ¹

¹ *Par.* xxxiii. 103-105 : *Abt Vogler*, x. 1, 2.

APPENDIX

LIST OF BOOKS LIKELY TO BE OF USE TO STUDENTS

N.B.—The bibliography of Dante is already enormous and is increasing at a rapid rate. The following short list of books may suffice for the student until he is able to direct his own reading. Many of the books here mentioned will suggest others for perusal. The *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, published quarterly at Florence (Libreria Succ. B. Seeber), reviews or summarises all books and articles in periodicals referring even indirectly to Dante.

I. FOR BEGINNERS

1. The most convenient, and the only complete English translation of Dante's works is that in the "Temple Classics" (Dent & Co., 1s. 6d. or 2s. each vol.) as follows :
The Comedy (Italian and English text and notes) 3 vols.
Vita Nuova and Minor Poems (Italian and English text and notes), 1 vol.
Convivio (English text and notes), 1 vol.
Latin Works (English text and notes), 1 vol.
2. The most convenient edition of Dante's complete works in the original is Dr. E. Moore's *Oxford Dante* (Clarendon Press, 6s. or 8s.), with Index of Names and Notable Matters by Dr. Paget Toynbee.
3. As introductory books the following are strongly recommended :
Dante, by E. G. Gardner ("Temple Primers," Dent & Co., 1s.)
Dante Alighieri, by Paget Toynbee. (Methuen & Co., 5s.)
 Each of these contains an analysis of all Dante's works and much other useful information.
4. For those who can read Italian :
La Vita di Dante in compendio, by N. Zingarelli (Milan, Vallardi) is also useful. More than half the book is taken up by an analysis of the Comedy. *I sette cerchi del Purgatorio di Dante*, by P. Perez (Verona, 1867) gives the best account of Dante's purgatorial system.
5. The best verse translations of the Comedy are those by H. W. Longfellow, and H. F. Cary. The latter has had the advantage of being edited by Dr. Paget Toynbee. (Methuen & Co., 3 vols. 1s. 6d. or 2s. 6d., and cheap edition, 1 vol. 6d.)

6. D. G. Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets* ("Temple Classics," 1s. 6d. or 2s.), which includes his masterly version of the *Vita Nuova*, is strongly recommended as enabling the English reader to compare Dante as a lyric poet with his predecessors and contemporaries.
7. For History and Biography the following are recommended :
The Chronicle of Dino Compagni, translated by E. C. M. Benecke and A. G. Ferrers Howell ("Temple Classics," 1s. 6d. or 2s.).
 G. Villani's *Florentine Chronicles*, selected and translated by Selfe & Wicksteed. (Constable, 6s.)
 Dr. Moore's *Dante and his Early Biographers*. (Rivingtons.)
 Wicksteed's *The Early Lives of Dante*. (De la More Press, 1s. 6d.)
 Bryce's *The Holy Roman Empire*. (Macmillan.)

II. FOR MORE ADVANCED STUDENTS

General and Miscellaneous

1. Dr. Paget Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, 1898, 25s.) is an invaluable book of reference for all "Proper names and notable matters" in Dante's works.
2. Dr. E. Moore's *Studies in Dante*, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Series. (Clarendon Press, 10s. 6d. each.) Series 2 contains very useful articles on the Astronomy and the Geography of Dante.
3. Gaspari's *Italian Literature to the Death of Dante*, translated by H. Oelsner (Bell & Sons, 3s. 6d.) This gives an excellent account of the origin and development of lyric poetry in Italy, and includes a summary account of Dante's Life and Works.
4. Dr. Paget Toynbee's *Dante Studies and Researches*. (Methuen and Co.)
5. Karl Witte's *Essays on Dante*, translated by Lawrence and Wicksteed. (Duckworth, 7s. 6d.)
6. A. J. Butler's *The Forerunners of Dante* (Clarendon Press, 1910), H. J. Chaytor's *The Troubadours of Dante* (Clarendon Press, 1902), and Vossler's *Die philosophischen Grundlagen zum süßsen neuen Stil* (Heidelberg, C. Winter., 1904) will be found useful aids to the study of Dante's lyric poetry.

THE COMEDY

1. H. F. Tozer's *English Commentary on the Divina Commedia*. (Clarendon Press, 8s. 6d.)
2. The modern Italian Commentaries by F. Torraca (Albrighi, Segati C. Rome-Milan, 1905-1907), and T. Casini (5th edition, Florence, Sansoni, 1907) are strongly recommended.

3. The Latin Commentary by Benvenuto da Imola (edited by Lacaita, 5 vols., Florence, 1887) is the most interesting and (with obvious reservations) the most illuminating exposition of the Comedy ever written. It dates from about sixty years after Dante's death. The Italian translation by Tamburini (Imola, 1855-1856) is not to be relied on.

The Italian Commentary by Francesco da Buti, of about the same date as the foregoing (3 vols., Pisa, 1858-1862, second-hand only) is specially valuable on the allegorical side, which is rather neglected by the moderns.

The Italian Commentary by Boccaccio (edited by Milanese, Florence, Le Monnier, 1863), which only extends down to *Inf.* XVII. 17, is also important. This edition includes Boccaccio's *Life of Dante*.

4. F. d'Ovidio's *Il Purgatorio e il suo preludio* (Milan, Hoepli, 1906) is long, but very pleasantly written, and throws a good deal of light on the *Purgatorio*.
5. E. G. Gardner's *Dante's Ten Heavens* (Constable, 12s.) is a very helpful companion to the *Paradiso*.
6. Blanc's *Vocabolario Dantesco*, translated into Italian by Carbone (Florence, Barbera, 1883), is a handy dictionary of all the words in the Comedy.

DANTE'S MINOR WORKS

1. *Lectura Dantis: Le opere minori di Dante Alighieri*. (Florence, 1906.) Lectures with notes on all the Minor Works, by eminent authorities.
2. *Dante e Giovanni del Virgilio*, by Wicksteed and Gardner. (Constable, 12s.)
3. *La Vita Nuova di Dante*, edited by M. Scherillo (Milan, Hoepli, 1911).

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

1. *Dino Compagni e la sua Cronica*, by I. del Lungo. (Florence, 1879-1887, second-hand only.)
2. *Magnati e Popolani in Firenze*, by Gaetano Salvemini. (Florence, Carrescchi, 1899.)
3. *Dante*, by N. Zingarelli. (Milan, Vallardi, 1899-1903.) This is the third volume of the *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, and can, unfortunately, not be had separately.
4. *Dell'esilio di Dante*, by I. del Lungo. (Florence, 1881.)
5. *The Two First Centuries of Florentine History*, by Pasquale Villari, translated by Linda Villari (Fisher Unwin). (Better read in the original *I primi due secoli della storia di Firenze*, Florence, 1893.)

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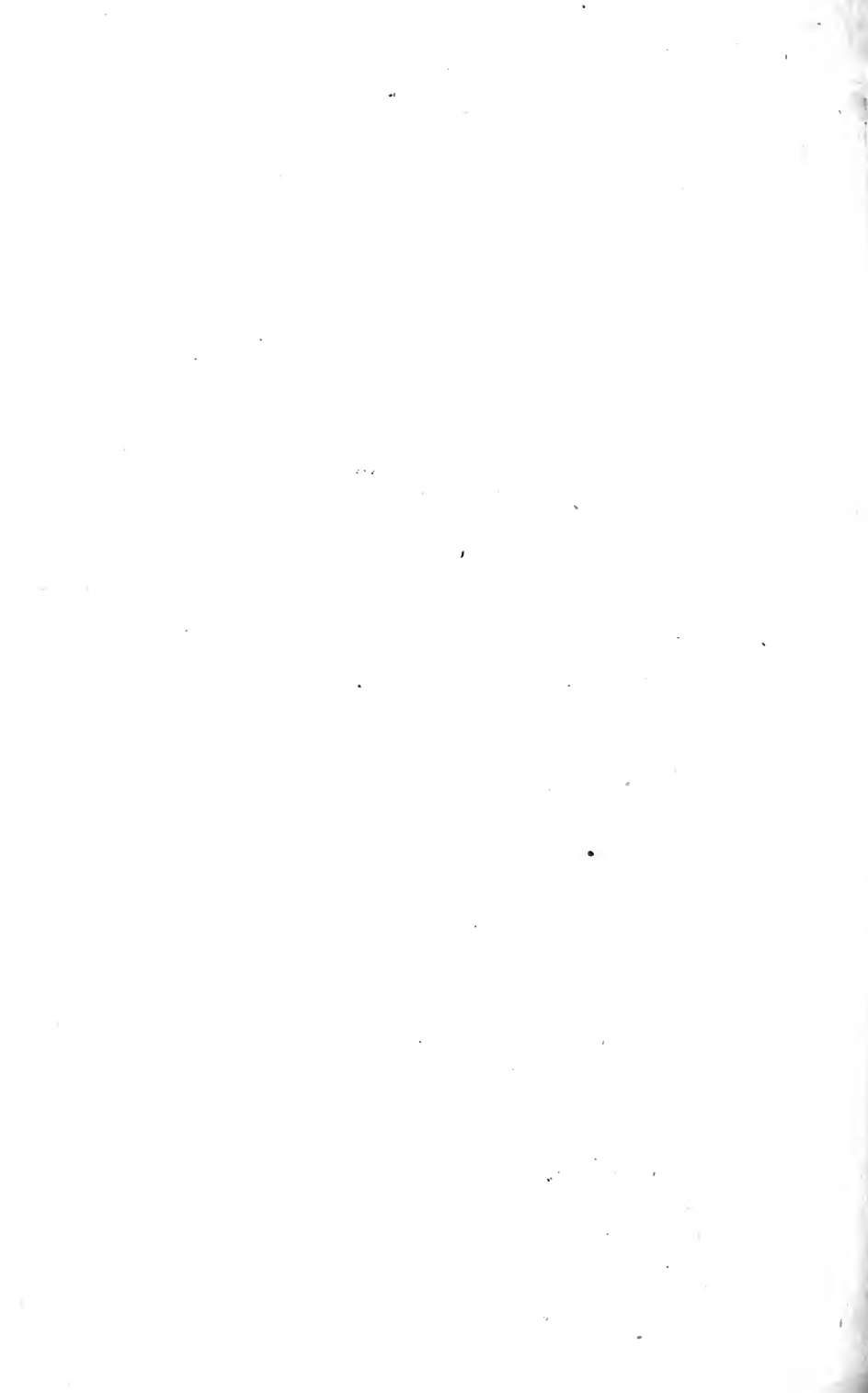
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